# MISTER FISH KELLY

ROBERT McBLAIR

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# MISTER FISH KELLY

MR. KELLY'S MOOD SOARED.

# MISTER FISH KELLY

## A NOVEL

BY

ROBERT McBLAIR

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK ✦ ✦ ✦ MCMXXIV

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TO

THE MEMORY OF

NINA

AND HER LAUGHTER

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# MISTER FISH KELLY

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## CHAPTER I

### FINANCIAL LOVE

ONE sunny summer evening, about dinner time, Mr. Fish Kelly trundled a grocer's two-wheeled delivery cart up the middle of one of the white folks' most pretentious residential streets. His prominent white teeth alternately shone and disappeared against the blackness of his thin countenance as he smiled—and then pouted, thinking that he might be observed. He was experiencing the delights of anticipation. Miss Ella—a good provider—worked near by, and she was seriously considering accepting his hand in matrimony.

A bend in the street brought a handsome gray stone dwelling into view. Reaching a spot exactly opposite the lane beside the dwelling, Mr. Kelly wheeled his cart to the left with military precision, let it tilt forward until its end rested upon the curb, and dropped a brick in it to hold it down. Then, jerking his droop-

ing black felt hat to a rakish angle, he shuffled across the sidewalk and up the brick-paved lane.

The large toe upon Mr. Kelly's generous right foot protruded darkly through a hole in one of his down-at-heel black oxfords, and a worn, funereal black suit, several sizes too large, flapped about his lanky frame. But Mr. Kelly's mood soared above holes in shoes and was the opposite of funereal. He was about to lift a quavery tenor in song when he heard a masculine guffaw, followed by Ella's shriller cackle, float through the kitchen door.

Fish Kelly paused, with his long black hand inside the hole of the weather-beaten wooden gate. He recognized that masculine guffaw: it belonged to a colored gentleman known interchangeably as Reverend or Lawyer Little, and it did not have a pleasing sound in Fish's ears. Behind Fish Kelly's desire to marry Ella was a wish to be financially at ease and thus free forever from the moral and physical domination of this very Mr. Little. And if Lawyer Little was calling upon Ella it was a dangerous sign that Lawyer was in search of a good provider, too. The kitchen door was just up the lane. Fish listened to the words that followed.

"Yes, *ma'am!* Ten years dem niggers got."

"Ten years?"

"Yassum. Ten long years, a-bustin' rocks on de James River. Winter *and* summer."

"M–m–m—*uh!*" This being a mild high note hummed by Ella with mouth closed, signifying polite astonishment. Came next the slamming of the oven door, the sliding of a pot over the stove, and a brief rattling down of the fire.

"How come dey gin' 'em so much ef dey never done it?"

Lawyer guffawed briefly. "Ain't I done tole you? *Dey* was de niggers what *crossed* me. Ain't no nigger never crossed me yit an' got away with it. Naw, suh!"

"An' de jedge he gin' 'em ten years 'cause you tole him to?"

Lawyer did not fall into this trap. "I ain't sayin' how I done it. Git a man into cote, an' dey's more'n one way of skinnin' a cat!"

The scraping of a chair over the floor fell next, and Fish, who had been listening with his prominent eyes more than usually protruding, hastened to unhook and open the gate with some noise. He was familiar with the case referred to. The two negroes convicted of burglary had been reputed to be enemies of Lawyer's, and this using of the mysterious ma-

chinery of the law for motives of personal revenge filled Fish with awe. It signified a terrible power in one man's hands. Fish was aware that a colored man, once haled to court, had scant chance of returning from there in less than thirty days. But that he also became the plaything of the dark forces of intrigue—a mere cockleshell in the cross currents of injustice—had never before occurred to him. His mother's favorite admonition rose in his mind. "Never erritate a lion," his mother had always said. "Ef a lion got yo' haid in his mouf, tek it out real *e–e—easy*. Don't *never* erritate a lion!" Fish's rising hostility toward Lawyer began to take on the pale cast of thought. He shuffled morosely up the four wooden steps and pushed open the kitchen door.

"Evenin', Miss Ella. Evenin', Mr. Little."

Ella showed the whites of her eyes and mumbled something. She saw complications enter with him.

Lawyer Little sat near the stove in a backless wooden chair: billowed out on all sides of it in a long-tailed coat that had once been black but had faded to a sickly green. His fat hands were clasped before him as if in support of his stomach, and his short legs seemed trying to burst through his tight greenish trousers.

Bottom up on the brown linoleum at his feet sat a battered and greasy opera hat. A pair of gold-rimmed spectacles rested on the end of his brown shiny nose. Perspiration trickled from his three chins down the front of a tie-less celluloid collar, and his glistening brow was beaded by the kitchen's heat. He took out a red bandanna handkerchief, mopped his bullet-shaped head and round bacon-colored countenance, and smiled fatly, achieving an expression of mingled wiliness and affability.

"Evenin', Mr. Kelly. Evenin'! Come in, suh, an' find yo'se'f a seat. Miss Ella an' me been projeckin' here all by our lonesome. She been tellin' me dat it's yo' brother-in-law, de Reverind Winkles, what tends de Mountain Park Cimetery."

Fish was conscious of the note of rivalry in Lawyer Little's velvet tones and it overcame his caution. He had spent too long a time at this courtship, it meant too much to his hopes, for him to resign the field now. He drew a soap box from beneath the sink and seated himself. "How my gal?" he inquired of Ella.

Ella's round face became the storm center of dark emotions. Her expansive, shapeless figure was clothed in black—a token of be-reavement for two departed husbands—and

her skin was blacker than her clothes. She pouted her large lips and banged a pot of potatoes down on the stove with unnecessary violence.

Lawyer Little seemed surprised at this mani-Yo' gal! She ain't nobody's gal. Reckon I been tryin' to git her to be *my* gal long enough time. Naw, suh! She ain't nobody's gal!"

"How come she ain't nobody's gal?" This overt attack on Lawyer's part, in the very presence of the desired, was too much for Fish's poise. Crouched on the soap box, his elbows on his skinny knees, he batted the whites of his eyes at Lawyer. "How come it?" he repeated. "Dat's what I wants to know. How come it?"

Lawyer Little laughed. *"Yo'* gal! He, he! festation of belligerency on the part of the gentle Fish Kelly, and for a moment was at a loss for words. Emboldened by Lawyer's silence, Fish got up, took the pasteboard top of an egg box from the table, went over to the stove, and raked forth some fine white ashes. Returning to his seat, he salvaged a piece of raw potato from the garbage pail. Having prepared his stage, he produced a folded razor from a hip pocket, opened it with ostentation,

and began cleaning it with the potato piece dipped in ashes.

Lawyer Little's verbosity received a further check at this maneuver. Perhaps the connection between himself and the razor was too obvious for doubt. The kitchen was silent for several moments. Then—

"Um–*huh!*" Lawyer Little ejaculated. "Carryin' concealed weepins, ain't you?"

Fish's arm, as if paralyzed, stopped in mid-effort.

"Sixty days for 'at. Sixty days, an' mebbe a fine. Yas, suh!"

"Never erritate a lion!" thought Fish.

"Dis here ain't my razor," he protested in a high voice.

"Whose razor 'tis?" demanded Lawyer sharply.

"Man ast me to keep it for him."

"What sort of man, dat?"

"Tall, black nigger, he was. Ast me to keep it for him."

Lawyer laughed scornfully. "You's a tall black nigger, ain't you? Yeah! Reckon a *tall, black* nigger did give it to you. Huh!" He rose in fine scorn and dignity, removed the spectacles which he had put on as a visiting ceremonial, took up and put on his stained

opera hat. "Good evenin', Miss Ella," he announced. "I will see you to-morrow, ma'am." Brushing some pie crumbs from his rumpled greenish vest, he stalked grandly from the room.

"What dat nigger doin' here?" demanded Fish, as soon as he had heard the gate close behind Lawyer.

"How I know what he doin' here? He just here, dat's all."

"How long he been comin' here like dis?"

"How I know how long he been comin' here? Been comin' here long time."

"How come you ain't never said nothin' 'bout him comin' here?"

"What for I got to say sump'n' 'bout him comin' here? He got a right to come here when he want to, ain't he?"

"You hear me tellin' you," stated Fish, swelling threateningly now that Lawyer was gone. "You hear me tellin' you! Dat nigger got to keep 'way from here. Reverind Winkles gwine have a new nigger in dat cimetery, don't somebody look out."

Ella, lips pouted, and face like a midnight cloud, shoved the pots noisily about on the stove.

"Whyn't you come on an marry me, 'oom-

an? Whyn't you quit all dis projeckin'? Somebody gwine git killed round here fust thing you know."

"I ain't studyin' 'bout no marryin'," retorted Ella sullenly. "I has enough trouble wid de niggers what drifts by. Don't need no steady one. I done told you—I ain't askin' nobody to marry me."

"You hear me tellin' you!" declared Fish, waxing warmer as the results of Lawyer's intervention began to become apparent. "Dat Lawyer—he gwine git his th'oat cut, he don't look out."

"Whyn't you go on an' behave yo'se'f?"

"I wanta know when you gwine marry me, 'ooman?" Fish repeated stubbornly. "I been hangin' round here nigh on two years now, waitin' for you to make up yo' mind. Now, jes' 'cause dis nigger wid a high hat come along, you gittin' uppity."

"I got set de table for dinner," announced Ella sullenly. "I ain't got no time to be messin' round here wid no fightin' nigger."

"I done tole you, 'ooman. Dat's all!" said Fish to her broad retreating back. He got up and shuffled moodily out into the gathering dusk. He was by nature melancholy and distrustful of Providence. This gloomy outcome

of his afternoon's hopes served merely to renew his subjective feeling that the cards of life are stacked. He righted his pushcart, turned it slowly around and trundled disconsolately down the street.

Pretty soon he was crossing the arched iron bridge that led to the older section of this southern seaport town. Round yellowish street lamps, in clusters of three, were beginning to compete palely with the fading light of day. Electric advertising signs had sprung out against the far-away wharves and warehouses, down where the creek joined the harbor, and threw jagged elongated reflections upon the dark writhing water. Fish leaned back, on the downward slant of the bridge, and let the weight of the cart pull his gangling frame along. Then he pushed on steadily for another block, finally to whirl his cart across the sidewalk and park it in the rear of the Sanitary Grocery Company's red brick building. This accomplished, he shuffled to York Street where he turned his feet homeward.

Down York Street was flowing the evening tide of home-coming colored workers, men and women of all shades of yellow, black and brown, dressed in the rags and tatters of their work clothes. The women were returning

from a long day of picking the meat from freshly boiled crabs, to be packed in tins and shipped to the metropolitan markets. Some of the men still wore on their horny hands the mud-crusted strip of leather that protected them when they chipped the end off an oyster and then ripped the shell open and the succulent mollusk out with one motion of an expert knife. Others had been finding in the oysters the tiny oyster crabs, no larger than a currant, and so soft and tender that their little reddish insides could be seen through their translucent shells. These small creatures, exact duplicates of their large hard-shelled cousins, were shipped away to the exclusive city and seaside hotels, to tickle the palates of epicures. Some of the men had shreds of cotton sticking to their clothes, from the cotton warehouses across the river, and others were grimy with coal dust from their labors in the coal yards near by.

The blue sputtering of arc lamps lighted the procession at the corners, but, between the intersections, the dark shuffling forms were gobbled up by the shadows of the leafy elm and horse-chestnut trees that lined the curbs. Occasionally a lighted orange street car would grind and rumble by, conveying belated white

folks to their dinners across the river. But between whiles the street was silent, except for the scuffling of flat, run-down shoes, the soft throaty baritones of the men and the shriller voices of the women raised in conversation, and the frequent crescendo chorus of carefree mellow laughter. York Street was the morning and evening thoroughfare for these laborers, but it still preserved—particularly at its upper end—the character of an aristocratic residential section. Major Braxton's square, four-story red brick residence raised its haughty head above the high red board fence that shut off its half-acre lawn from the gaze of the passer-by. Across the asphalted street a row of red brick dwellings stood with faded green blinds folded before their large white-shaded windows. Ten wide sandstone steps led up to the fluted wooden columns of their porches and the mute repulsion of their closed storm doors. They were like old maids with folded hands, and lips closed in prim disapprobation of the approach of a new and unfamiliar order.

For the unfamiliar order was on its way. As Fish shuffled morosely along the brick sidewalk he noticed that one of the handsomest of the houses had a sign that said "Boarders

Wanted." And at the corner before Boush Street barrels of apples and potatoes, and trays of beets, cabbages and onions were conspicuous in the lighted windows of a newly opened grocery store.

At Boush Street the procession turned for half a block to the left, and then to the right into Queen Street—where the outlook abruptly changed. This was the negro quarter of the town. The middle of the street was no longer asphalt, nor even of leveled Belgian blocks. It was paved with cobbles. Grass sprang greenly in the gutters and afforded a welcome pasture for bearded and odoriferous goats. In several places the bricks were missing from the sidewalks, having been taken up by the residents for building purposes, or used impulsively as ammunition in some extemporaneous affray. The houses were two-story clapboard affairs with mildewed shingle roofs. The paint had long since peeled from their battered façades, and they seemed to lean against one another in various attitudes of disconsolation or repose—an effect that was heightened by the way shutters had of hanging askew by one hinge, whence they would teeter out wildly in any gale of wind. Fish observed that on the northern side of the street, where he was

walking, the bricks near the houses, and even the bottom boards of the houses themselves, were filmed with a greenish mould, which accumulated in this moist climate in crannies shielded from the sun.

"Hi, Fish! Good evenin', Mr. Kelly!" Such were the salutations that Fish Kelly received as he drifted past the lighted store windows and happy talkative inhabitants of this populous street, and he returned the greetings in kind. But he was not the person to take his troubles lightly. The fact that he craved the financial security of Ella's bosom, and that the dominating Lawyer Little was thwarting him, pressed like nettles into his mind. It warmed him to be in the homely neighborhood of his people, but he was in no mood to welcome the social advances of his fellow man. So he purchased a box of chocolate marshmallow cakes and a can of peaches and mounted two flights of rickety creaking stairs to his room, whose darkness was relieved only by the grisly beams of an opposite street lamp, and the rolling whites of his own protruding eyes. After he had consumed his supper, he lay down, fully clothed, upon a sagging canvas cot, and passed almost at once into an unbroken slumber.

## CHAPTER II

### LAWYER LITTLE IN THE ROLE OF LION

EARLY the next morning a rattling milk wagon on the outside cobbles shattered the silence of Fish Kelly's room and aroused him to the duties and tribulations of existence. He arose, and after executing a sketchy toilet at the pump in the small back yard downstairs, emerged into the sunshine of Queen Street and shuffled across the cobbles to the Liberty Lunch Room, where he chose a seat at an oilcloth-covered table by the window.

A menu lay before him. Fish Kelly had never been inducted into the mysteries of reading and writing, but he had no thought of telling the world about that. He picked up the blue menu card and carefully perused its grease spots, flyspecks and thumb prints. Then, when the burly proprietor approached him with an inquiring look, he issued his usual order for ham and eggs and coffee and gave himself over to an idle inspection of the strings

of red and green peppers that hung in dusty loops among the cobwebs of the whitewashed rafters above his head.

The eggs and ham were soon cooked, and sooner eaten, and Fish Kelly found himself shortly shuffling along the sidewalk, in the direction of the Sanitary Grocery, with nothing to do but work. The thought of work was depressing. It brought along with it, somehow, an intangible menace of the law, in the form of Lawyer Little, and a gnawing sense of uncertainty as to the trend of Ella's affections.

At the store Fish ran into an atmosphere of mild and unpleasant excitement. The engineer, it seemed, was ill; the temperature in the meat room was getting too high, and the new store manager was angry and excited in his efforts to start the refrigerating engine himself.

The electrically driven refrigerating machine was housed in a long narrow cellar, lighted by occasional dirty electric bulbs depending from the rafters of the ceiling. The new boss, a small man with a suit of blue overalls drawn over his business clothes, peered into the mysterious white entwining pipes of the refrigerating machine, a worried look upon

his sallow pointed face. Four or five of the colored help were passing to and fro, bringing cases of canned goods from the freight room and opening them up for the day's retail trade. As Fish appeared at the foot of the narrow steps, the new boss hailed him.

"Hey, you black boy! Come here! What's your name? Didn't I see you helping the engineer here the other day? All right, get around the other side and put some grease in them grease cups. Hurry up! I'm going to get this thing started."

Fish crawled under the belting with a can of grease and filled the grease cups as directed. Crawling back, he saw that the boss was reaching for the switch.

"Wait a minute, boss!" yelled Fish.

The boss paused.

"You ain't turned 'em cocks yit," explained Fish, scrambling to his feet. "Dem two cocks on de 'monia pipes. Dey got to p'int t'other way."

The little man, his sallow skin mottled and glistening from his adventurings with the unfamiliar machine, glared at Fish.

"Who the devil's running this machine?" he demanded.

"You's runnin' it, boss. I jes' gwine say dat de engineer he always—"

"You can't tell me nothing about this machine. Go over there and oil those bearings and keep your head shut."

Fish pouted his lips and blinked his eyes, because he knew that he was right. But there was nothing to do except go to the other side of the machine and oil the bearings. He had barely got there when the boss threw in the switch and the big engine began turning over, endeavoring to pump the ammonia through the refrigerating plant and force the resulting cold current along the frosted pipes that lined the ceiling of the meat room upstairs. But the engine had hard going. The bearings seemed to grind, and after a moment there came a hissing sound from near one of the cocks that the boss had not turned. The boss cut off the switch and began peering into the machinery.

The pungent, threatening odor of ammonia began to permeate the dim cellar, and under the dirty electric bulbs the men could be seen rubbing their eyes and coughing. Two years before, an ammonia pipe had burst, suffocating three colored assistants, and in the unpleasant memory of this Fish decided to make one more effort. He shuffled over to where the white

man still peered into the bowels of the machinery.

"Boss!"

The white man started. "Well, what is it?" he snapped.

"Dem two cocks, boss. De engineer he always p'inted 'em t'other way. Dey opens de 'monia pipes. Can't no engine pump de 'monia wid 'em closed."

The boss's pointed face had grown crimson.

"Didn't you hear me tell you to keep that black mug of yours out of this? I spent all Sunday morning with the engineer, going over this machine, and, by gad, if I don't know how to run it, nobody does. Get over there and oil them bearings and stop shooting off your face."

Dubious and unwilling, Fish obeyed. After a moment of peering, the boss again threw in the switch. Once more the big engine began turning over, but very grudgingly. The bearings groaned, the bolts knocked, the belt began slipping on its wheels with little squeaks, and the hissing sound near the cock started again and got louder. Instead of throwing off the switch this time, however, the boss turned the control lever on the motor and made the pump go faster and faster.

The noise was hideous. Fish, his knees shaking, was debating with himself whether to pray or run when, with a tremendous detonation, a cylinder head blew out and the place was deadly with fumes.

For a moment Fish was stunned. Then, out of instinct, he dashed for the stairs, but he fell over the boss, who was crawling toward the rear of the cellar. Fish scrambled to his feet, and managed to reach the street floor, coughing and choking.

"'Monia pipe done bust," he spluttered, in answer to the assistant manager's pleadings.

"Are there any men down there?"

"De boss an' fo' or five men. De in-jine it's a-pumpin' right along, too."

The assistant, a round, pink-cheeked young fellow, rose to the occasion like a man.

"'Phone to the hospitals and get ambulances," he cried to a clerk. "'Phone to our other store to send the ammonia helmet at once. Fish, you race around to the American Ice Company and borrow their ammonia helmet. Hurry, for Heaven's sake, Fish! Men are dying in that cellar."

Fish flew the two blocks to the American Ice Company as though he had wings. They wouldn't trust him with the helmet, but sent it

by a young clerk; and Fish spent the returning two blocks dragging this young man, who wanted to preserve a deliberate dignity, by one arm.

A large crowd cluttered the store entrance when they arrived. Backed up to the curb were several ambulances, and policemen already were stretching ropes at the corner. The manager and the clerks had been forced out to the doorway by the spreading fumes, and here they were struggling desperately with the company's ammonia helmet. They threw this down at sight of Fish and his companion, snatched the helmet, and the manager put it on over his own head. After feeling it for a moment, he snatched it off.

"Good Lord!" he almost wept, "the tubing is rotten! It won't work, either!" Going pale, he began trembling all over. "They're dying!" he cried.

They heard the cellar door burst open. A small colored man staggered toward them, tears streaming from his tightly closed eyes, his body convulsed by coughing. He became violently sick and fell heavily in the doorway, where he lay writhing. Two white-clad internes immediately sprang upon him, rolled

him on to a stretcher, and slid him into an ambulance, which dashed clanging away.

At this point a fire engine and hook and ladder rolled up to the opposite curb, and the crowded doorway became further congested by the helmeted firemen.

"This smoke helmet's no good for ammonia," said the sergeant. "Where's your ammonia helmet?"

"They are both broken," answered the panic-stricken assistant, his teeth chattering. "What are we going to do?"

A young fireman, without waiting for orders, took a deep breath and ran into the store as far as the cellar door. Here he threw his hand to his eyes as if stricken, turned, and came staggering blindly back.

" 'Monia done got him," said Fish to himself. "He open' his eyes."

"There's a man on the stairs there," cried the young fireman hoarsely. "I saw him! Oh, my Lord, I'm going blind!"

He was led to the curb, and another ambulance dashed noisily away. Two firemen, clasping hands, with eyes tightly closed, felt their way to the cellar stairs and returned with a limp colored man, the veins nearly bursting on

their crimson foreheads from so long holding their breath.

"That makes all the men," cried the assistant manager. "Only the boss is down there now."

Fish remembered the direction in which the boss had been crawling, and went out before one of the store windows where little circles of semitransparent, thick glass, each about the size of a dollar, had been let into the iron-and-concrete pavement to help illuminate the cellar. He heard something striking at his feet, kneeled down and peered through one of the glasses.

"Here he!" yelled Fish. "Here he! Hoppin' up and down like a frog in a bucket!"

The firemen brought their picks and broke three of the little glass discs. But the iron-and-concrete base was built into the granolithic pavement and could not be budged. Through the holes they could see the little sharp-faced manager leaping up again and again in a senseless endeavor to catch at the perforated paving. Once he caught in one of the holes and hung on by a finger for several minutes. And all the while he was screaming: "Save me! Save me!"

"Run up the steps! Go through the cellar and up the steps!" they shouted at him. But

the man continued to leap at the paving and scream.

"He ain't gwine do no runnin'," said Fish. "Dat man crazy scared. 'Tain't gwine be long 'foh dat 'monia fin' out whar he at, neither."

Seeing his boss down there leaping and screaming had a peculiar effect upon Fish. The boss is the uncrowned king among his colored help. In his mouth is truth; with one hand he dispenses justice, and with the other assistance for the ill or the injured. He solves every problem; he jokes with the meritorious and blasphemes the careless. He is the leader; in the old Afric tribe from which Fish drew his blood this man would be the chief.

Before anybody fully realized what was going on, before Fish realized it himself, he had wrapped a piece of sacking about his head and dashed down into the cellar. He knew his way without having to open his eyes, and he was guided by the boss's screams. The ammonia permeated the sacking and stung his closed eyelids and his nose. The still air in his lungs seemed to expand till it would tear itself out through his chest. He could hear his heart beating in his ears.

Where the boss was screaming, the ammonia must have been kept temporarily away by some

trick of the air's circulation. But Fish had noticed the boss's inflamed eyes and he did not dare remove the sacking and take another breath. It seemed physically impossible for him to restrain his chest muscles any longer, but, stumbling upon the boss, he slipped a wiry arm about him from behind.

The trip back was a stumbling horror of clanking machinery, stinging fumes, and dizziness for Fish, with his stifled breath like a wild beast in his breast. The boss sagged limply over his arm, and not till strong hands snatched his burden from him did he dare throw off his sacking and gulp a deep breath of the outside air. Packed about and submerged by the crowd, he stood dizzily on the pavement for several moments, supporting himself against the store window, while the last ambulance clanged away and the fire engines prepared to depart. Then to Fish's ears came a sinister and familiar voice.

"Who was workin' on de in-jine wid dat white man?" inquired Lawyer Little of some one at his elbow.

Fish slid down even further out of sight.

"Ef dat white man die," went on the authoritative voice of Lawyer Little, "dat nigger he gwine have a bad time. Yas, suh! You hear

me talkin'? Police gwine want to know how dat axdent happen."

Fish did not wait till Lawyer should have ferreted out the culprit and have discovered him to be his rival. He would not wait until Lawyer should have him haled to court, and in that palace of mysterious injustice have arranged for his ten-year period of rock-breaking on the James River. With as little ostentation as might be, Fish worked his way along the side of the building till he was free of the crowd; slipped round the corner, and crossed the street to a lane, up which he struck at a dogtrot.

"Don't *never* erritate a lion," thought Fish.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LION CHANGES PLACES

THE enterprising *Virginian Dispatch* had a special extra on the streets within the hour. In fact, had the new boss been able and so inclined, he might almost have beckoned from his ambulance and read the details of his condition and the chances of his recovery before even reaching the hospital. Little boys with big voices streamed from the alleyway where the huge presses were rolling, and percolated like a plague of singing locusts to every quarter of the city. It was on Queen Street that a reed-legged infant, with freckles and molasses taffy inextricably commingled upon his countenance, obtained a penny from the itinerant Lawyer Little in exchange for a three-inch headline and four columns of fact and fancy.

Resuming his seat in the decrepit, carpet-bottomed chair before the barber shop, Lawyer proceeded to read the news to his friend, Benny

Hooton, the proprietor, who had never been blessed by a reading and writing education.

"Fo' de Lawd sake! Dis here paper say all dem men 'fatally affected' by dat 'monia. De hospital doctor say de manager he ain't gwine git well. It say fo' niggers daid or dyin'."

"Who dey?" demanded Benny.

"Willie Harpy, George Nichols, Harry Cooper, and—Lawd he'p me to git right!—Fish Kelly!"

"Fish Kelly? I know dat man. Him a skinny black nigger."

But Mr. Hooton found himself addressing a disappearing audience. Lawyer Little, having wriggled hastily to his feet, had started in the general direction of the white folks' section without even a word of explanation. He took the short cut, across Duke Street bridge, even though it brought him within hailing distance of the grocery of Mr. Hapgood—who had threatened to have him arrested for stealing an egg—and so great was his preoccupation that he passed, without noticing, two white gentlemen lawyers, whom ordinarily he would have favored with a deep and ingratiating bow. His bacon-colored face was glistening and his breath was short when he opened finally the door to Ella's kitchen.

"Sister Ella," announced Lawyer Little, who now had assumed the offices of reverend, "Sister Ella, I's got bad news fo' we-all."

"What's matter?" demanded Ella sharply, looking up from where, resembling a ton of coal, she had been sitting and supping some tea out of a saucer.

"Sister Ella," announced the Reverend Little, in a deep, sepulchral voice, "our brother Fish Kelly have been taken from us."

Ella stared at him, the whites of her eyes the only relieving spots in her general blackness.

The Reverend Little entered the kitchen, seated himself upon the backless wooden chair, and donned his gold-rimmed spectacles as a ceremony fitting to the occasion. He then gravely read aloud the lurid account, even to the effect of ammonia upon the aquatic glands of the lungs—which the rewrite editor probably had culled from a convenient encyclopedia.

"Praise de Lawd!" cried Ella piously, when he had finished. "Praise de Lawd! Who ever heerd tell?" She sat there shaking her head.

"Sister Ella," went on the Reverend Little, "de Lawd have sent me to comfort you. He came to me in a vision, Sister Ella. Dere was a ladder of fire and gates ajar an' He come a-walkin' down de streets of time. An' He

says to me: 'Go to Sister Ella an' comfort her and take her unto wife.' "

"Praise de Lawd!" sang Sister Ella. She was evidently stunned by the news about Fish, and was on the verge of "getting religion."

"So," continued the reverend hastily, endeavoring to intrude more mundane matters upon her frenzy, "we'll go round to Preacher Jackson's to-night an' he'll marry us."

"Ef I gits married," chanted Sister Ella, apparently on the border line between heaven and earth, "ef I gits married, I gwine git married by de Reverind Winkles. I gwine git married up at de Mountain Park Cimetery."

"We don't want git married at no cimetery," remonstrated the Reverend Little, displaying a strong distaste for the idea.

"Ef I gits married," sang Ella, becoming more emphatic and less religious, "I gwine to git married up at de Mountain Park Cimetery by de Reverind William Winkles. Him was de reverind what was gwine marry me an' Fish if ever I made up my min'. Praise de Lawd!"

"All right, Sister Ella; all right." The reverend put about and sailed with the favoring wind. "Jes' as you say, sister. I gwine come by for you to-night."

Mr. Little was not insensible to the advan-

tages in finance and comfort that would accrue to a husband of Sister Ella. But he was aware of the difficulty that even better men than himself had experienced in endeavoring to persuade her to enter into the joys of marriage. She viewed the bonds of matrimony with a coyness born of experience; besides, she was both fickle-minded and contrary. So it was with considerable uncertainty as to his reception that he called for her that night.

He was relieved to find her prepared and waiting, although she was garbed still in black and a thought of abstraction and of melancholy sat upon her brow. Her general effect of mourning, however, was relieved by a wide crimson belt of shiny patent leather and by a tall hat of the same striking color which seemingly maintained a precarious uprightness upon her fuzzy black hair by a marvelous effect of balance. Several rings, with stones of the color of rubies and emeralds, adorned the hand which held a green parasol with a white bone handle. She thrust out a generous foot in a run-down black shoe, as Lawyer entered, and regarded it mournfully.

"I kain't git on my good shoes," she declared. "Dem corns is sump'n' terrible."

"Dat's all right," Lawyer cheered her. "We ain't gwine have to walk."

By some legerdemain he had secured a small buckboard; and, drawn by an angular white horse, their way faintly lighted by beclouded stars, they proceeded toward the cemetery.

"Here 'tis," announced Ella, after they had driven for half an hour in silence. The iron gates were open between the brick gateposts, and before them a faintly discernible driveway wound off between ghostly tombstones and monuments into the darkness.

"Whoa!" cried Lawyer. "What you mean? We got to drive th'ough dis cimetery?"

"Dat's de onliest way I knows of," assented Ella gloomily.

"Dis here look mo' like a funeral dan a weddin' to me," complained Lawyer. He peered ahead into the silent but populated darkness, and it seemed to him that some of the pale tombstones were moving.

"What dat?" ejaculated Ella.

"What what?" demanded Lawyer, jumping.

"Thought I heerd sump'n'."

"I ain't heerd nothin'," replied Lawyer bitterly. "I don't see what you want holler so sudden for!"

They sat there for a few moments, looking into the darkness.

"Let's go back an' git married by Preacher Jackson."

"When I gits married," replied Ella, "I'se gwine git married by Reverind Winkles. Him always marries me. An' ef I don't git married to-night," she concluded, "I ain't gwine git married 'tall."

"Git up!" cried Lawyer, whacking the old white horse. They passed through the gates and along the driveway that wound up the hill. On either side glimmered faintly discernible foot and headstones, punctuated now and then by a stark and specterlike monument that stretched out goblin arms. The crunching of the wheels reverberated uncannily in the dark, and the still, dewy air seemed to have clammy fingers. Lawyer moved closer to Ella and urged the old horse to speed. After several minutes of driving, they had reached and traversed the crest of the hill without coming in sight of human habitation. A cold wind crept along the roots of Lawyer's hair as he was struck by a terrible thought.

"Maybe we's in de wrong cimetery!" he suggested, in a hoarse whisper.

Ella sat in gloomy silence. The buckboard

rolled along. Suddenly she emitted a shrill "Whoo-e-e-e!"

"Fo' de love of Gawd!" cried the startled Lawyer.

"I jes' callin'," retorted Ella.

Sure enough, a turn in the road disclosed the lights of the parsonage and the spire of the little wooden church, only a few hundred feet away.

The Reverend William Winkles came out to meet them with a lantern and assisted in carrying the three bottles of beer and the two long watermelons that Lawyer, as caterer for the wedding supper, had tucked away under the back seat. They filed into the little cottage and deposited their burdens on the dining-room table, while the Reverend Winkles, who was unfeignedly glad to see them, extinguished the lantern and procured them chairs.

"Yas, *suh*!" he emphasized, rubbing his partly bald, white head with the palm of his hand. "I sho' am glad to see you folks! I been livin' in dis here place, off and on, for nigh on forty years, an' to-night's de fust time I ever been skeert."

"What you skeered of?" demanded Lawyer, with immediate interest.

The shriveled old darky wagged his white

head, took off and cleaned and tremulously replaced his silver-rimmed spectacles.

"I ain't likin' to talk 'bout sich things," he replied.

Lawyer looked about him uneasily. Though the evening was cool, beads of moisture stood out upon his plump face, and his skin was slightly paler than its usual bacon color. Only unfamiliarity with the locality and the thought of having to pass again through the cemetery kept him still a member of the party.

"Did you know Fish daid?" inquired Ella.

"What! What dat?" exclaimed the old man. "Fish daid? When he die?"

"Dis mornin'. Got into some 'monia or sump'n'."

"Fo' de La-a-awd sake!" He raised his dim eyes. "Lawd in heaben, dis sho' am a sign from You!"

"What kind of sign?" inquired Lawyer huskily.

Reverend Winkles raised a horny finger. "Chillun," he admonished, "listen to me while I tell you. I was a-settin' here dis night a-studyin' 'bout my sermon, jes' 'fo' you-all come. An' seemed to me like sump'n' a-snappin', an' I looks up an' right th'ough dem shutters I seen two big white eyes a-blinkin' at

me like a sperrit. Seem to me like dey was Fish's eyes. Den I heerd sump'n' go 'Woo-e-e!' like a fiery soul."

"Praise de Lawd!" whispered Lawyer. He tried to speak louder, but couldn't.

Ella, a visitor at the parsonage all her life, had so far evinced no change in her phlegmatic attitude toward existence. But suddenly she turned her face to the door that, in the darkness of an alcove, led to the pantry and kitchen.

"What dat?" she inquired sharply.

After making his escape around the corner and up the lane, Fish had worked his way by devious and inconspicuous routes to the outskirts of the city, and here, in the shelter of a copse of young magnolias, he reclined comfortably with his head upon a bit of turf. It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that he gave himself over to meditation. Nine o'clock in the morning had passed by the time he had arranged himself comfortably. At noon he moved his head a little so as to get his eyes out of the sun. About three o'clock he slipped off his right shoe, and about four his left. Probably about five o'clock, the scratching and rustling of a thrush in a near-by drift of leaves and the chattering of a red squirrel overhead

made him think of "hopping a freight" and going down to see his folks at Newbern. While he was considering this, he fell off to sleep again.

The coolness of evening finally awakened him. He rose and stretched and rubbed his knees and put on his flapping felt hat and drifted toward the city. Turning at length into Queen Street, before Hammer John's saloon, he ran suddenly into big Ted Harpy, who drove the delivery wagon for Mr. Greenberg. Ted was a popular young man, equally adept with dice, razor or fists. From a small waist his powerful shoulders swelled out gracefully beneath a mustard-colored suit and his feet were encased in pointed yellow oxfords.

"Hi, Ted!"

Ted looked up. A startled expression spread over his brown, circular, good-natured face. He took a step backward.

"What's matter wid you?" demanded Fish. "I ain't no bear to be 'fraid of."

"Paper say you was daid," explained Ted, stepping still further away.

"If I ain't never no mo' daid dan dis," chuckled Fish, "den I reckon I'll be alive from now on."

Ted Harpy accepted his return to life, and

showed a shining gold tooth in a grin. They stood on the corner and watched the crippled colored man in the soap box, drawn by the white goat, drive home after his day of selling papers.

"I been down the hospital see my cousin Willie," announced Ted presently. "Got sick wid some 'monia dis mornin'."

"How he?" inquired Fish at once.

"He all right. All dem fellows all right."

"How de white-man boss?"

"He gwine be all right. Dey lookin' fo' de colored gemman what was workin' wid dat white man when de thing busted."

"How you know?"

"Willie say so. White man tole him."

Fish glanced quickly over his shoulder—and who should he see approaching leisurely, swinging a stick but Police Officer Johnson.

"Got to see a man," he explained to Ted, and, losing no time, he proceeded down Queen Street and darted up the first lane on a run.

After Fish had put danger behind him and dusk had begun to gather, he became painfully conscious of the fact that he had not eaten since morning. Examining his pockets, he found a tan shoe string, a razor, three pawn tickets, a clasp knife with one half of one blade,

a pair of red celluloid dice, and a wooden collar button. The dice might be good for a bite somewhere, but he did not like the idea of returning to the lighted shops. He bethought him, therefore, of a place where he had often before found sanctuary, and struck out for the parsonage of the Reverend William Winkles, who had married Fish's oldest sister, now deceased.

The night was overcast. Fish circled the cemetery, and darkness had gathered thickly on the fields before he neared the little church. He knew his way, however, and followed the footpath that led along the side of the church to the parsonage. The parsonage windows were illuminated; there was silence within and without, except for the shrillness of crickets and the flutter of a dipping bat. It occurred to Fish that it was well inside the realm of Lawyer Little's cunning to be awaiting him there with minions of the law. Therefore, stepping noiselessly, he approached the house and, choosing a shuttered window, peered through.

The Reverend Winkles, a large Bible across his skinny knees, was reading by the light of an oil lamp, occasionally pausing to pass his hand over his partly bald head as if in meditation. The old man's eyes came up and seemed

to meet Fish's; and at the same time a shrill "Whoo-e-e!" echoed from the cemetery gate.

Without pausing to think, Fish fled precipitately in the direction from which he had come. At a safe distance, however, he stopped and began to consider. It came in upon him that the voice was Ella's. It was unlikely that she was accompanied by Lawyer Little. She might even have come with some ham or chicken for the parson. She often carried such things home from where she worked. Fish's mouth began to water. The black magic of Ella's nearness worked upon him, and he found himself creeping again in the direction of the house. He removed his shoes and entered the kitchen, then the pantry, where the odor of food made him ravenous.

The first lift of his elbow, however, had calamitous consequences. A disturbed bag of meal lurched downward and leaned its open mouth against his ear. Fish turned and embraced it before it fell, and restored it to the shelf. But the Fates were at work. The voice of Ella demanded: "What dat?" In a trice the door was whipped open by the Reverend Winkles; and there, awaiting Fish, as by a prearranged stratagem, sat the suave and sinister Lawyer Little.

In the whitewashed wall, halfway between himself and Lawyer, was an open window. It was for this that Fish, after a moment of petrifaction, made three wild leaps.

But again Lawyer Little intervened between him and liberty. Lawyer's teeth had been chattering audibly as he listened to the Reverend Winkles' story of the sperrit's white eyeballs looking through the blinds. It had occurred to him that he and Fish, after all, were old compatriots, and that he had doubtless been a bit hasty in taking advantage of his comrade's decease. If the dead Fish Kelly should feel the same way about it—if he should decide to return and haunt his over-zealous rival—what better time, or place, than the pitch darkness of the surrounding cemetery! Lawyer felt that those sperrit's eyes at that moment were peering down the back of his neck. And then, when the door whipped open, Lawyer had seen a grisly phantom in the deep gloom of the pantry. It was nothing less than a disjointed embodiment of the dead Fish Kelly—the features his, yet veiled by a ghostly film; the skeleton narrow and gangling like his, but now a grisly white.

So at the window Lawyer and Fish Kelly met.

There was a brief but interesting struggle. Lawyer, astride the window sill, his face a mottled gray, his eyes distended, kicked and struck, his paralyzed vocal organs trying to scream, "Go 'way!" but emitting only weak and wordless cries. By some miracle the stained opera hat remained upon his head, the only reminder of past dignity. Fish, with one foot out of the window, but further egress blocked by Lawyer's rotundity, had lowered his head for protection from Lawyer's blows, and was struggling feverishly to get at something in his right hip pocket.

Before vision might fully have taken in the scene, there came a superhuman effort on the part of Lawyer Little; the next second the window held only Fish. There sounded a crash of breaking glass as Lawyer landed in a lettuce bed, and a moment later his rotund form could faintly be seen against the horizon as he descended the crest of the hill, clearing grave and tombstone and mausoleum with equal facility, his progress punctuated by flashes from his revolver, fired with entire abandon as to direction.

After Lawyer had disappeared into the night and the last far echoes of his retreat had melted into silence, Fish drew his leg inside the room and slowly folded his razor.

"What's matter wid 'at nigger?" he demanded.

He found a strange audience.

"Go *'way* from here!" Ella screamed. She had lifted her skirts and mounted upon a chair.

Back in the opposite corner, watermelon knife in hand, the Reverend Winkles stood prepared to sell his life dearly.

"You-all crazy?" asked Fish.

"Is you daid, or is you ain't?" Ella wanted to know.

"What I doin' daid? Who been tellin' you I daid?"

"Lawyer Little say you daid wid 'monia?"

Fish snorted: "Dat nigger he say anything."

Ella, always the least temperamental of the party, climbed down from her chair. She stood for a moment regarding Fish; and then, all the clouds having blown away, her ebon face broke into the sunshine of white teeth and laughing eyes.. She cackled loudly.

"Dat Mr. Little, he sho' was runnin'!"

"He runnin'," Fish chuckled, "he runnin' like he been erritatin' a lion!"

The laughter at this sally died down, and Fish cleared his throat.

"What you-all gwine do wid dat watermillion?" he inquired.

"Us gwine eat it," said Ella, taking the knife from the Reverend Winkles. "Set yo'se'f up a cheer."

For perhaps twenty minutes there was silence in the room, except for the succulent gushing of teeth through melon, the burbling of beer from the bottle, and the occasional dropping of a watermelon seed to the white oilcloth of the table. At length, however, Fish sighed, wiped his thin black face on his sleeve, and leaned back in his chair.

"Miss Ella," he ventured, " 'Pears like to me dis here is a fine time fo' we-all to git married."

Ella's expression of cheerful relish darkened at once into a pout. She looked at her suitor out of the corner of her eyes.

"Nigger," she said with finality, "you an' Lawyer Little done cured *me*. Dat's what I mean. Ef I has all de trouble, of a-shootin' an' a-runnin', an' folks dyin' an' den comin' back, *widout* bein' married, what you think gwine happen ef I is? Naw, suh. You' an' dat fat nigger done cured me, sho'."

"Fish," suggested the Reverend Winkles, seeing a long-desired opportunity, "why don't you stay clear of dat Lawyer Little? You know he ain't never done nothin' but git you in trouble."

"I knows why he don't," Ella interjected. "He scared of dat man. Dat why he don't."

Fish pouted his long lips and slowly covered and uncovered the whites of his prominent eyes. He went to the door and looked out, but there was no sign of Lawyer.

"I ain't skeered of Lawyer Little," he announced. It was bad enough to be dominated by Lawyer, without having everybody know it. He stood in a listening attitude, as if expecting the echo of his bold words to come back into the room and strike him. But nothing happened. "I ain't skeered of Lawyer Little," he repeated.

How grand it would be if they should believe him! Gentle and retiring, he always craved to appear before admiring eyes in a heroic attitude. But he sensed that his declarations had been received with reserve. A wild resolve, a daydream, floated before him—that the world should see that he was his own master, and not Lawyer Little's slave.

First peering outside to be sure that Lawyer had not returned, Fish mumbled a farewell and stole forth into the darkness.

"I'se gwine git 'mancipated!" he told himself as he followed the path to the road.

## CHAPTER IV

### A SUBSTITUTE BRIDEGROOM

THE next day Fish was afraid to go back to the Sanitary Grocery, lest he should be haled to court and charged with causing the refrigerating machine catastrophe. He also did not care to meet Lawyer Little. So he spent most of his time under a trestle that crossed the sluggish salt-water inlet. He had found a nugget of meat and a piece of string, and he gave himself over to the occupation of crabbing. But as his only net was his flapping black hat, and as the crabs seemed unusually alert and active, he did not find this a profitable way of passing his time. So that afternoon he drifted homeward and managed, by tactful inquiry of mutual friends, to learn that Mr. Little harbored no thoughts of mayhem against him.

The next morning Fish borrowed a crab net from Benny Hooton, the barber-shop proprietor, and set off more hopefully for the river. But, in the middle of the forenoon,

having happened upon a matter of pressing moment, he returned to Queen Street in search of his portly associate.

He found Lawyer in a state of profound lassitude, on a chair before Benny Hooton's barber shop. His greasy opera hat was resting bottom up on the pavement at his side, his knees were parted to commode the undulations of his figure, his gold-rimmed spectacles had slipped toward the end of his broad, shiny nose, which in turn was almost resting upon his bosom, and a sibilant sound, which resembled the call of a locust to its mate, rose and fell upon the sunny, caressing air of early summer. Most of the dwellers in this section of the city were at work, and the dilapidated, unpainted, wooden houses on either side of the cobbled street looked down upon deserted red brick sidewalks.

Fish, first with the back of his hand mopping his tar-colored, almost indiscernible brow —for he had come in haste—seized a use-polished wooden chair, and drew it nearer Lawyer, with an intentional rattling and scraping.

Lawyer raised both eyebrows, then drew himself to a more erect posture, and with some effort opened his eyes.

"Yassuh," he murmured, as if continuing a conversation, "fine weather. Fine weather."

"Takin' a li'l' nap?" inquired Mr. Kelly ingratiatingly, showing a row of white teeth.

"Naw!" denied Lawyer indignantly, "I heered every word you say."

Mr. Kelly sat nervously on the edge of his chair, and revolved his black felt hat in his blacker hands.

"Mister Little," he began, "I got some business to 'scuss wid you."

Lawyer, whose means of livelihood rose entirely from just such chance matters of business, became immediately alert. He picked up his opera hat, and wiped it with the green-black sleeve of his frock coat, put it on his head, and adjusted his spectacles.

"You know," went on Mr. Kelly, rolling his prominent eyes to see that he was not overheard, "I'se sekertary for de African Living an' Dead Society."

Lawyer nodded, his dignity and reserve increasing with Fish Kelly's nervousness.

"All I'se askin' of you," Fish blurted suddenly, "is dat you do me right! Is it half-an'-half?" Half-and-half would mean financial independence, to which spiritual freedom is so closely allied.

"A friend of mine," replied Lawyer pregnantly, "is a friend of mine."

Fish, his forehead wrinkled into a knot of black skin, drew his chair closer.

"Dey's a nigger washed up outen de river jes' now," he half whispered. "I know who dat nigger is, an' I kin prove it."

"Who he?"

"He married Anna White."

"You mean John Henry?"

"Y–a–as, Lawd!" cried Fish Kelly, and he slapped his skinny knee.

Silence fell upon them.

"How much he got comin' to 'im?" inquired Lawyer after a moment.

"Dat nigger was a *saver*," declared Fish admiringly. "He got a death insurance of six hundred dollars."

"Um!" grunted Lawyer.

"An' dat ain't all," gloated Fish. "De policy say dat for a permanent disability he git three hundred dollars, an' if—"

Lawyer held up a protesting hand.

"He daid, ain't he?"

"Sho', he daid!" returned Fish belligerently. "Ain't I seen him? I was 'bout to tetch him, when a p'liceman—"

"Well," interrupted Lawyer, "if he daid, he

daid. Ain't no use talkin' 'bout no permanent disability. Six hundred dollars he got comin'. 'At's all."

"Ain't I seen him like he is?" demanded Fish, puffing out his lips, and snapping his prominent eyes. "Ain't I seen de policy, too?"

"Did you come here jes' to be a-argufying wid me?" returned Lawyer. "'Cause if you did, you kin go back whar you come from."

Fish, his lips still pouted, remained silent, but plotted rebellion.

"What make you think it's John Henry?" asked Lawyer, after a pause.

"'Member 'at bad nigger, named Willie, what come th'u' here las' week?"

Lawyer nodded.

"Well, him got projeckin' roun' John Henry's wife, Anna. De night John Henry got married, it was. 'At bad nigger Willie he kotched her round de neck an' kissed her, no more'n she'd jes' got married. John Henry speaks up, and dis bad nigger pulls a gun, an' chases him from hell on through."

"An' den what?"

"Ain't neither nigger been seen since. But I know what happen. 'At bad nigger Willie he kotch John Henry down in de freight yards

somewhar, an' cut his heart out, an' flung him in de river."

"How you know John Henry ain't done no cuttin'?"

"'At's John Henry what washed up," returned Fish Kelly firmly.

"I'se gwine down an' look at dat nigger my own self," announced Lawyer, laboring to his feet.

"Better not tech him," warned Fish. "Better leave him lay where Jesus flung him!"

Lawyer grunted.

"Wait a minute," added Fish, speaking slowly, as he evolved the idea. "If can't nobody tell he *is* John Henry, den can't nobody say he *ain't* John Henry, can dey?"

Lawyer looked at Fish, a grin spreading over his countenance. Then both of them broke into peals of laughter.

"You'se a *smart* nigger!" choked Lawyer.

"Yas, *suh*!" agreed Fish, slapping his skinny knee.

"You got me laughin' now," said Lawyer, after they had quieted down, "so I can't do no more thinkin' till I git sump'n' to eat. You got any change?"

"Sho, I got money," replied Fish, still chuckling.

They drifted across the street to where a thin cloud of grease smoke, and a delectable aroma of frying fat, floated through the rusted screen door of the Liberty Lunch Room.

After a period devoted to the wordless manipulation of two flexible steel knives with yellow bone handles, the gentleman adventurers leaned back in their chairs, and Lawyer picked at a white tooth with a splinter from the pine-board table.

"Who dis policy money gwine be paid to?" he inquired.

"To Mrs. John Henry."

"Dat's what I thought. Ain't but one way to git dis money. You got to marry dis 'ooman."

Fish's prominent eyes seemed nearly to drop out in surprise.

"Who," he exclaimed, "*me*?"

"You don't see nobody else roun' here gwine marry her, does you?" inquired Lawyer.

" 'At 'ooman, she too big an' strong for me."

"You ain't got to live wid her if you don't want to."

Lawyer's logic was always too much for Fish, but this is not saying that he was per-

suaded. He scratched the sparse black wool of his hilly cranium.

"S'pose John Henry was to come back? He's a bad nigger. He's almos' bad as 'at nigger Willie."

"Ain't you done seen him washed up?"

But the idea of John Henry's return had settled Fish.

"I don't want no money," he answered. "I got some money. Don't need no money in summertime, nohow."

"Come on out of here," continued Lawyer, rising in anger and disgust. "You an' me is gwine up street on some business."

And up the sun-dappled street, toward the white-folks' house where Anna Henry, *née* Anna White, was cook, the two proceeded, passing Hammer John's saloon without even looking in, and, later, greeting the crippled colored man in the soap box, opposite the white-folks' Methodist church.

Arriving in sight of their destination, Lawyer, whose domination over the gangling Fish was that of a father over a son, turned upon him.

"Go on over dar an' ax dat 'ooman to marry you."

Fish swallowed his Adam's apple.

"Mister Little," he began, weakly.

"Don't gimme no back talk!" interrupted Lawyer. "You done heerd what I said, ain't you?"

Giving Lawyer a reproachful glance, Fish drifted across the street. With feet dragging, his head with the black hat sunken forward, shoulders drooping, and the wind flapping his baggy black suit upon his ebon frame, Fish, as he disappeared into the lane leading to Anna's kitchen, looked as though he might be a mortal embodiment of Milton's "Melancholy."

"Evenin', Miss Anna."

Anna, a tall, rawboned, bacon-colored woman, turned from the ironing board with something of a start, not failing to retain a grip upon the iron. She was still suffering from the shock of a recent occasion when, almost upon the instant of having been joined to her in the holy bonds of matrimony, her husband had dashed violently from the scene, followed closely by a bad nigger shooting a .45-caliber gun.

"Evenin'," she replied without cordiality, turning her back upon Fish, and resuming her attacks upon the frills of a white shirtwaist.

A word of greeting from her fellow man

awakened only the unhappiest of stirrings in Anna's bosom; all of the week past she had been drawing in upon herself in the mortification of being a husbandless bride. Coming, as it had, upon the heights of her not too tactfully concealed triumph in being the selected of big John Henry, it brought too shining a mark against which previously despised rivals might drive their shafts of ridicule, and the situation was becoming intolerable. Already, she carried an artfully sharpened peeling knife within easy reach inside her shirtwaist. She expected eventualities from her temperament.

Fish Kelly, from his seat on the backless chair, regarded the movements of her powerful shoulders with grim forebodings. In fact, so grim became his forebodings that he rose and noiselessly slipped out of the door.

Anna turned an instant later and, seeing only a vacant chair where Fish should have been, dropped her iron.

"Jesus he'p me to git right!" she exclaimed.

She hurried over to the door, and was relieved to see Fish's tangible earthly form moving toward the street. But no sooner had he emerged from the lane than, as though encountering some spiritual impact, he stopped

short, hesitated, then reversed and mournfully returned.

"What's matter you?" she demanded sharply, as he arrived.

"Ain't nothing matter wid me," he responded sullenly, resuming his seat and revolving his black felt hat in his hands.

"Well, you ain't acking like it."

Fish swallowed desperately, and tried to keep his eyes off her powerful arms.

"Miss Anna."

"What you want?"

"I done come—I done walk all way round here from Queen Street to ax you sump'n'."

"What 'tis?"

Fish rose and got nearer the door.

"I want ax you—ax you if you'll marry me."

Anna stood transfixed, her mouth and eyes open.

"How come you want marry me?"

Fish made imaginary crosses on the floor with the toe of his shoe.

"I jes' thought I would."

Anna pursed her lips and looked askance, and it must be recorded that her thoughts were not much of Fish. They were of two light-complexioned ladies for whom she had sharpened the peeling knife. Of a sudden she saw

herself socially reconstituted before their angry and disappointed eyes. The idea grew and smiled at her.

"How long 'fo' you ready git married?" she asked. Those yaller girls should see that she was not one to remain neglected long.

"To-night."

"All right," Anna decided, "set down here an' I'll give you some victuals."

"Nemmind," responded Fish, wiping his brow, "I'se gwine see if I cain't fin' de Reverind Little."

## CHAPTER V

### A NECK GROWS UP AND HAIRS OUT

THE parlor of Anna's boarding house had been swiftly cleared and garnished, her earlier ceremony happily providing the paper lilies that still depended from the curtain strings and the sputtering gas jets. Reverend Little, fresh from Hammer John's saloon, stood large and jovial on the square of canvas by the windows, and lifted up his voice in time with the metallic and uncertain wedding march quavering in from the little phonograph in the hall. As many of the neighbors as the room would accommodate formed an unbroken wainscoting, alive with flashing teeth and eyes, undulant with nudging elbows and convulsive giggles.

Silence descended, except upon the reverend and the phonograph, as the dining-room doors fell open and the bride and groom came through. On Anna's face was an expression of resurrection, glorified by a crimson evening dress which revealed the massive sinews of

her bacon-colored arms. At her side was Fish. The trousers of his black suit showed creases of a razor sharpness, and his entire aspect, from crown to toe, radiated a high polish. A kitchen stove, fresh from the hand of the cleaner, affords a parallel. And, be it said to his credit, he was stepping high. Let the morrow hold what it might, for the moment he was the cynosure of eyes; a wide grin disclosed his dazzling teeth, his arms and shoulders and legs functioned in that happy conjunction which one associates with the drum major.

Arrived before the improvised altar, the couple waited till the reverend and the phonograph ran down. They then stood hand in hand while the reverend, in high good humor, said over them a very free version of the marriage ceremony.

"'At's right," he cried to Anna, "don't say 'High hill,' say 'I will'!"

"Speak out," this to Fish, "make folks see you'se glad you'se lucky. Dis ain't no funeral."

Anna answered loud, well pleased, and looked about to see if any contemptuous light-complexioned ladies had come to furnish occupation for the still handy peeling knife. Fish

grinned and shuffled. And the reverend, in addition to concluding the ceremony with a flourish, furnished the invention and initiative needed for the remainder of the program.

"All over," he shouted, waving his arms. "Hit's all over. An' I got some business to 'scuss wid dese here two married folks."

He pushed Fish and Anna before him into the privacy of the dining room, and closed the doors. "Miss Anna," he announced, "when I was a-coming 'long to-night, boun' for dis here weddin', Mister Harry Waller done tole me dat 'ere's a sight o' money comin' to you from de African Livin' an' Dead Society."

"How come?"

"From 'at husband of yourn, John Henry. He done been washed up by de river, an' you got six hundred dollars a-comin' to you."

Anna sat down suddenly in the nearest chair.

"Who say my John Henry daid?"

" 'Tain't no use argufyin' 'bout it," put in the reverend, hurriedly trying to forestall the visibly pending emotional outburst. "Come on quick an' git dat money. Six hundred dollars am a powerful lot."

He almost lifted her from the chair, and in a dazed fashion she let him lead her out through the back way, and along an incon-

spicuous lane, to the one-storied corner building which housed the African Living and Dead Society.

Fish Kelly kept what might be called a safe distance behind, experiencing a sinking feeling as the matter took on anew its explosive aspect; but he closed up as the three of them entered the rather dim room, on the opposite side of which, behind a red desk, Mr. Waller sat and ostensibly read a large book by the light of an oil lamp.

"Brother Waller," announced the Reverend Little, "like I done tole you, dis lady done come to git 'at six hundred dollars what's comin' to her."

Brother Waller closed the big book with a bang and took off his spectacles with a movement that suggested he might be preparing for a fracas.

"Can't 'at lady talk?" he demanded. "How come you got to do all de talkin'?"

"I'se dis lady's reppersentative," retorted Lawyer with dignity.

"Dis here Livin' an' Dead Society, it's got up for to take care of its members, livin' or daid. Yessuh! It ain't got up to be makin' a livin' for every fat nigger what's got a silk hat."

"I ain't de only fat nigger round here," countered Lawyer, belligerently. "I reckon dis lady got a right to a reppersentative if she want to."

But Mr. Waller had turned his profile to the gathering, and was registering what may be called a nervous indifference.

" 'Tain't no use talkin' to me," he insisted. "I don't talk to nobody but members. I'se paid to talk to members and I talks to members. I don't talk to nobody else."

"All right," agreed the wily Lawyer, "*all* right! Miss Anna, step right up here an' git you' six hundred dollars."

Anna shuffled through the railing gate. Fish followed, but moved round behind Lawyer.

Confronted by Anna's angular frame, Mr. Waller, though still aggrieved, became more respectful.

"What you want, lady?" he asked.

"Dis gemman say I got some money."

"I don't know nothing 'bout dis gemman," interrupted Mr. Waller. "I want to know what *you* want."

"She want her money, dat what she want," interposed Lawyer, with some feeling.

"How come you got some money here?"

continued Mr. Waller, not noticing the representative.

"Dis gemman say my man John Henry daid."

"Dis gemman! Dis gemman! Don't you know ef he daid or no?"

"How I gwine know ef he daid?"

"What yo' husband's name?" demanded the treasurer.

"Big John Henry."

Mr. Waller reopened the cumbrous book.

"Here 'tis," he said after a moment of searching. "De records say if Big John Henry die, pay six hundred dollars to Miss Big John Henry. Is dat you?"

"Sho' dat's me."

"How you know John Henry daid?"

"I seen him daid," put in Fish.

"When dat?"

"I seen him daid dis mornin'. Got washed up outen de river."

"Wot you got do wid dis here case?" demanded the guardian of the treasury, growing immediately angry.

"Reckon dis lady's my wife, ain't she?" answered Fish, pouting his black mouth and snapping his eyes.

"Yo' wife! How long she been *yo'* wife?"

"We done jes' been married."

"What kind o' goin's on is all dis?" cried the treasurer. "You find dis lady's husband daid dis mornin', an' marries her to-night! You ain't after her money, is you?"

"Naw, suh! Naw, suh!" exclaimed Fish, keeping Lawyer between himself and Anna.

"You ain't got nothin' to do wid dat," put in the lady's representative. "All you got to do is pay dat money to Miss Big John Henry, like de book say."

"An' dat money for de permanent disability," added Fish.

"I don't know nuthin' 'bout no Miss Big John Henry," returned Mr. Waller, who was not inexperienced in the profitable management of financial affairs. "Dis lady, she Miss Fish Kelly. Look like to me day ain't no Miss John Henry."

"A—a—a—yee—oo!" screamed the bride, emitting a sound reminiscent of the cannibalistic depths of an African forest, a sound that struck a chill of horror into the marrow of her hearers.

"A—a—a—yee—oo!" She was having difficulties with the bosom of the unaccustomed red dress, but finally got the shining peeling

knife free. "You done cheated me outa my money. A—a—a—yee—oo!"

"Leggo me, nigger! Leggo me!" yelled Lawyer Little. Fish Kelly, from behind, had seized him by both arms, and was using him as a shield in the manner originated by Captain John Smith.

"Leggo me!" yelled Lawyer, struggling desperately to be free, as the huge Anna advanced with the manner of one who has come into her own, and the unit made by Fish and himself as rapidly retreated. "Quit your holding me, nigger!"

But Fish held him with a grip born of the law of self-preservation. Anna made a sudden sweep, and only by leaping backward upon Fish did Lawyer save himself from being decapitated.

"Whar my six hundred dollars?" cried Anna. "Whar my John Henry? Lemme git at dat little black nigger."

Two casualties would without doubt have occurred immediately had not at this juncture the front door crashed open and the voice of Big John Henry filled the room with thunder.

"Show me dem niggers been projeckin' wid my woman!" cried John Henry, advancing like a Goliath from the doorway.

Fish released Lawyer. All four of the actors stared at John Henry in the paralysis of astonishment.

He was dusty up to the knees of his green wedding suit, and burs and shreds of dead leaves clung to him as if he had been sleeping in the fields. A partly healed cut ran across his left temple. His left arm was stiff at his side—but only for a moment. For, seeing Fish and Lawyer in the corner by the window, he reached inside his coat and drew from his left sleeve a gun that to Fish and Lawyer looked as big as a cannon.

"Show me dem niggers," he repeated, "I done jes' started on my killin'."

"Mr. Waller suddenly disappeared beneath the red desk. Anna abruptly yielded the field and dived in after him. But neither of them was as quick as Lawyer Little. He developed that amazing grace and swiftness that we sometimes find in large animals. Without any preparatory motions he leaped clean over Fish and through the window, carrying the sash with him. He hit the ground running. A shot, two shots, rang out. A four-foot hedge appeared before Lawyer. He cleared it like a gazelle.

He was prepared to clear anything else that

might appear before him, because behind him came the sound of pursuing footsteps. Lawyer increased his speed. He had the uninterrupted use of a good dirt road, but it availed him nothing. The faster he ran the faster the footsteps followed.

Nature can stand but so much. Our hidden wellsprings of energy are only so deep. Lawyer slowed, staggered, threw himself down by the roadside.

"Don't kill me!" he gasped. "Don't kill me!"

Fish Kelly, of the pursuing footsteps, also came to a stand. He sank down on a boulder beside Lawyer, wiped his dripping forehead, and panted deeply. Only after a few moments was he able to voice the dissatisfaction within his bosom.

"I knowed I didn't have no business marryin' 'at woman," he said. "Wouldn't no such idea ever came into *my* haid."

But Lawyer also was bitter. Who had been the one to see John Henry dead on the river bank?

"Haid!" snarled Lawyer. "You ain't got no haid! Yo' neck jes' growed up an' haired out."

While the moon rose slowly over the quiet

roadside, Fish sat and gloomily wondered whether Lawyer's accusation could, by any mischance, be true.

He pondered the question further that night on his cot in his Queen Street room, and came to the conclusion that the insult was undeserved.

"My haid jes' as much a haid as anybody's!" he muttered, as he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HYPNOTIZER

THOUGHTLESS cruelties in government ferment in the breasts of peoples and result in revolt and the overthrow of kings. This unkind remark of Lawyer's fermented in the skull pan of Mr. Kelly and caused the rise of further thoughts. Again he asked himself—Why should he stand for being eternally maltreated by this brutal tyrant, who rewarded him only with blows? And he began wondering in what manner he could establish his moral freedom.

It was by chance that the very next day he met what seemed the answer.

Fish had been standing on the corner of Queen and Charlotte streets in an after-lunch coma of digestion, when he was accosted by a distinguished-looking colored man who had just arrived in town—so he said—accompanied by his "assistant," and had a plan out of which, with local coöperation, could be made a fortune. Fish grasped at the idea. Financial

independence once assured, spiritual freedom would follow. But over the roseate glow of his thought fell the dark realization that Lawyer's wit was needed to make these dreams come true.

After a few moments of indecision, Fish, his gangling frame clothed in black but a shade darker than himself, drifted mournfully along Queen Street, followed closely by the professor and his yellow assistant.

Lawyer Little, chin on chest, his balloon-like figure relaxed, his greasy opera hat resting bottom up on the brick sidewalk, was asleep in a chair in front of Benny Hooton's barber shop. Here the cavalcade came to a halt. Fish swallowed his exposed Adam's apple several times, then sank on to the edge of an adjacent chair. With uncanny swiftness the professor collapsed his great length into the remaining chair and fixed Lawyer Little with his dull eye. The other eye, very piercing and intelligent, was walled at an angle of twenty-five degrees, and launched a relentless stare upon Fish. The professor had that strange thing in a colored man, a meager Vandyke beard; and he had a gift for silence. Small cold things began scuttling up and down Fish's spine.

Fish's attention was attracted by the antics of Lawyer Little's somnolent face. Lawyer's eyebrows twitched and his flat, bacon-colored nose quivered. Suddenly his eyes opened, to find a dark man with long, bony features regarding him intently with one eye.

Lawyer sat bolt upright.

"What you want?" he demanded.

For answer the dark man silently took a blue silk handkerchief from the breast pocket of his gray swallowtail, then deliberately plucked his intelligent right eyeball from its socket, and began polishing it.

Lawyer leaped to his feet.

"For Gawd's sake!" he exclaimed.

Fish Kelly interposed a word of explanation.

"Him a hypnotizer."

"Him a what?"

"A hypnotizer. He want to give a show."

Lawyer recovered his dignity. He picked up his opera hat and smoothed it with a shiny green-black sleeve before putting it on. He sat down again and donned his ceremonial gold-rimmed spectacles.

"We gwine give a show," went on Fish nervously.

"We!" snapped Lawyer. "Who is 'we'?"

Fish had hoped that Lawyer wouldn't adopt that attitude.

"Me," he faltered, "an' de professor, an'—an' you."

"If dere's a you in it, ain't going to be no me in it," retorted Lawyer testily. "Ev'y time I done anything wid you it done ended in trouble. You's a Jonah."

Fish swallowed nervously, his thin frame balanced on the edge of his chair like a black measuring worm.

"I seen him first," he protested weakly.

"What?" yelled Lawyer, in his most threatening tone.

Fish was startled into a rising position. He moved to where there was free egress into space in several directions before he repeated:

"I seen him first. We done had it all fixed 'bout who gwine give de show. You kin ask—"

But as Fish indicated the professor for confirmation his voice failed him. That silent gentleman was refitting his right eyeball into its socket. The operation completed, the horrid orb fastened itself upon Fish with a chilling glare. Fish's jaw dropped. Without another word he turned and drifted down Queen Street,

his black clothes flapping on his blacker frame, a moving picture of dejection.

He passed gloomily by the aromas of the Liberty Lunch Room, and, a little farther on, the even more seductive aromas of Hammer John's saloon left him cold. His finances, consisting of a nicked razor and a pack of greasy cards, allowed of neither food nor drink. He followed his nose into Huntersville, where little black-and-tan children, with big eyes and dragging trousers, swarmed like beetles over the cobbles and hung, thumb in mouth, on the precarious railings of unpainted wooden dwellings.

Fish finally came to a halt opposite the red gas house. A huge canvas tent had mushroomed up on the lot that usually was reserved for old tin cans, goats, and baseball games. Around the tent other tents had grouped themselves, and everything was bustle and hurry. That night would witness the opening of the Greatest Show on Earth.

Fish, his retreating chin hanging in wonder, shuffled nearer, and he was much startled when a tousled head projected itself from a tent flap and shouted:

"Hey, boy! Want a job?"

"What kinda job?" inquired Fish, immediately on the defensive.

"Easy work. Just toting water to the lions."

"To de what?" ejaculated Fish.

The white man grinned. "They can't get out. Just want you to clean a few cages and tote some water. Here."

The fellow emerged clumsily from the tent and extended a tin cup. "Take a swig of that and come on."

Fish sniffed, then grinned widely and emptied the cup.

"I'd be lion my own self ef I took much of dat!" he chuckled.

The man led the way into the big tent. Gangs of men were driving stakes, tightening guy ropes, erecting the grand stand with a great clatter of boards, raking sawdust and shaking down trapezes. His guide proceeded to an addition to the great tent and indicated the empty cages that were to be cleaned and furnished with straw and fresh water.

For two hours they worked, but Fish did not find the labor arduous. Whenever he felt weary, which was about every fifteen minutes, he would say:

"Dis work mighty heavy for a small man."

His companion, who was already several

laps ahead, would immediately stop and produce one of the two flasks he carried and give Fish a drink, taking another drink himself "Just to be friendly."

Presently, as dusk was gathering and the gas torches had not been lit, they began stumbling over ropes and bumping into each other, every mishap being greeted with uproarious laughter. The white man grew so weak with merriment and refreshment that he sank down with his back against a wagon wheel and extended Fish his keys.

"Go up that end cage and clean her out," he instructed. "Then we'll be finished."

Fish stumbled along the row of cages and, coming to a big one that was locked, unlocked the door and climbed in. It was rather dark except near the bars, but he started in with his rake. It seemed to him as he worked that he heard strange noises near by, but he did not locate their source till he lunged into a corner after straw. His rake hit something soft, he was deafened by a horrible roar: a huge form leaped out of the darkness and he saw a tremendous shaggy yellow head, lashing tail, and eyes of green fire.

"Great Gawd!" yelled Fish. He dashed to the door, but it was only ajar and his impact

slammed it. He heard a movement behind him and, screaming aloud, he snatched open the door and leaped. Striking the ground, he dived under the tent. Outside a fat man tried to grab him as he passed, but was not quick enough.

Fish fled through the exterior bustle like a bullet and, crossing a small ravine in the dusk, gained an inconspicuous road to town. Here presently he slowed and drew breath, although he kept strictly to the middle of the road and avoided all dark objects and shadows.

Liberty Hall was on the immediate outskirts of Huntersville. The hedge-bordered lane leading straight up to it at a turn in the road was so inviting, Fish was tempted to go in and take a nap. But his recent experience was not conducive to a night in a dark and lonely building; the inner man also interposed an argument; and Fish continued into Huntersville and turned down Queen Street, to find a crowd of colored folk gathered in front of Hammer John's saloon.

Fish pressed close, to see in the display window, instead of the usual fly-specked and cobwebbed bottles, a strange spectacle.

The professor's yellow assistant, a red gingham wrapper over his brown suit, was

stretched out on his back inside the window, his eyes closed, his expression even more vacuous than usual, his hands folded upon his chest, each clasping a bunch of goldenrod.

It was an awe-inspiring scene. From the assistant's yellow shoes, with the toes rounded as if each concealed a doorknob, to his still and expressionless face, there radiated suggestions of occult mystery, considerably heightened by the goldenrod and the red gingham wrapper. The final touch was lent by a large, hand-printed cardboard placard:

THIS MAN HIPNOTIZED BY PROFESSOR BROWN. TO-NIGHT AT NINE O'CLOCK THE PROFESSOR GOING TO WAKE HIM UP AND HIPNOTIZE HIM SOME MORE. HE WILL HIPNOTIZE ANYBODY IN THE AUDIENSE FREE OF CHARGE.
COME ONE COME ALL
TO LIBERTY HALL
ADMISSION 15c. LADIES 10c.
SINGLE LADIES 5c.

Lawyer Little, carrying a small wooden box under his fat arm, pushed his way through the crowd and struck Fish on the back.

"Come on over an' git su'p'n' t' eat off'n me!" he cried.

"I seen him first," replied Fish bitterly, as he recovered from the blow.

"Come on, nigger. Me an' you is friends!"

Fish by nature was melancholy rather than vindictive; Lawyer could always handle him; and just now he was quite willing to relinquish his righteous asperity in favor of a square meal. He drifted in Lawyer's wake, and they sat down at a table covered with white oil-cloth in the Liberty Lunch Room.

With the enthusiasm of the born promoter, Lawyer dilated on the success of the new idea, upon the number of tickets sold, and upon the personality of the professor.

"Dat sho' is a real sho' 'nuff hoodoo hypnotizer, dat man. Ev'y time I looks at him I sees a ghost."

"You right," laughed Fish, enlivened by the sight of corned beef and cabbage. "Dat man, he got a bad eye."

There fell a silence, broken only by the clink of knife on plate and by certain succulent inhalations.

The repast concluded, Lawyer pushed back his chair.

"Come on wid me," he directed. "I'm gwine give you a free ticket for nothin'. A frien' o' mine is a frien' o' mine."

The tall, thin, melancholy black man and the rotund, jovial, bacon-colored man made their way through the evening press of Huntersville, past the popular corner stores and the more populous saloons, along the lamp-lighted street, with its infrequent trolley car; surrounded by the kindly, laughing, gun-toting, gay-hearted men and women and children of every shade of black and brown, dressed in every character of raiment.

At Liberty Hall, already a few stags and couples were on the porch demanding entrance, so Lawyer took their money and ushered them inside, lighting the gas and opening the windows on the sides of the square room with great show of hospitality. He then placed a small table at the door and officiated as the crowd grew larger.

"You must got a hundred dollars in dat box," Fish ventured.

"Ain't got nowhar near dat," returned Lawyer, remembering Fish's claims and not relishing the subject.

"You got a thousan', den," Fish compromised.

"A thousan' mo' dan a hundred, nigger."

"How long it been?" demanded Fish, batting his eyes.

"You de most argufyin' nigger in de world. Go on up dere an' take yo' seat on de platform."

"I ain't goin' on no platform all by myself."

"Dere's de professor now. Come on, we'll go in de stage entrance. Look at dat lightning! Glad everybody here 'fore de storm bust."

Seemingly all who were coming had arrived, so Lawyer left his post, and he and Fish joined the professor and his yellow assistant and two burly helpers at the stage entrance. One of the helpers carried a large ironing board.

Lawyer unlocked the door and they filed into the small space behind the stage, hidden from the audience by the paper walls of the stage room.

## CHAPTER VII

### CRAVINGS COME TRUE

FROM the auditorium came the constant murmur of conversation rippled by laughter, and the imminence of so many staring eyes tautened all the actors in the grip of nervousness. Their faces wore strained grins, all except Fish, who sank deep into melancholy and stood in a corner like a stick of tar with two large white eyes.

Lawyer, perspiring freely, went out on the stage and lighted the three gas jets for footlights, retiring hastily at the mingled applause, catcalls, hoots and whistles that followed his success in kneeling down and getting up again despite his avoirdupois.

"Take dese two chairs out dere," he instructed Fish.

Fish pouted his lips and glowered.

"I ain't studyin' 'bout no chairs," he replied.

The two helpers also refused point-blank, so Lawyer had to do this, too. Amid renewed applause, he placed the chairs facing each

other in the center of the stage, about six feet apart. Next he brought out two more chairs and put one at each side of the platform near the footlights.

"You ready?" he asked the professor when he returned.

The professor nodded gravely, whereupon the two helpers, who had been coached in the back room of Hammer John's saloon, held, one at either end, the ironing board, while the yellow assistant stretched himself in precarious balance upon it, folded his hands, and assumed an attitude and expression of somnolence.

"Aw right. What you waitin' for?" whispered Lawyer, testily.

The two helpers, one backing, shuffled out on the stage with their burden and placed it upon the two chairs. The audience, which had begun buzzing as the two men came out, fell into awe-struck silence as it inspected the mysterious sleeper, now visible to them in full profile. The tension was decidedly heightened by a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a clap of thunder that reverberated across the heavens. From the auditorium came murmurs and grunts and moans, indicating deep interest.

Lawyer used force to get Fish from behind the scenes. Once in front of the footlights there remained nothing for Fish to do but collapse hastily into the nearer chair, where he entwined his huge feet and gazed upon them in an anguish of dark embarrassment.

Next before the audience came Lawyer, who waddled out, nervously mopping his brow. He bowed and grinned at the flutter of applause and began his introduction.

"Ladies an' gemmen, fellow citizens, and brutherin an' sisterin in the church of Heaben," was his opening, and he at once captured his hearers.

"Professor Brown is one of de greatest an' foremost hypnotizers in de big world to-day. I trimbles, ladies and gemmen, when it comes to me sometimes what dat man could do wid his wonderful gift of magic if he warn't a good man."

The audience hearkened raptly, as Lawyer paused.

"Don't he talk beautiful?" inquired one stout dark lady, too loudly. She subsided with gigglings at being overheard.

"Yessuh," Lawyer continued, "I trimbles in my bed of a nights. Why, dis man could hypnotize de president of dis here United

States an' make him go to sleep an' de country would come to a stock-still. He could hypnotize de engineer on a locomotive an' de train would jump de track.

"Why, dat man kin hypnotize ever'body in dis audience. He could hypnotize ever'body in dis city. He could hypnotize ever'body in de United States if he jes' set his mind to it."

Lawyer was interrupted by groans and grunts of interest and wonder.

"Ladies and gemmen," cried Lawyer, with a dramatic gesture, "I asks you to look on Professor Brown, de greatest hypnotizer of de ages!"

Precisely at this moment the tall Professor Brown stalked into view, caressing the fringe of his Vandyke beard. Taking the center of the stage as Lawyer sat down, he reached within the breast pocket of his gray swallow-tail and drew forth a blue silk handkerchief. Suddenly shaking his arms wide apart, as if to indicate that there was nothing in that sleeve and nothing in this sleeve, he slowly raised his right hand and plucked forth his piercing right eye from its socket. At almost the same time another flash of lightning rocked the heavens with its thunder.

The audience sat spellbound, then tossed

like a sea. Ladies giggled nervously and cast glances at the door or at nearer windows. Some of the gentlemen frowned and looked threateningly about as if to say, "Who got me in dis place, anyway!"

The professor polished his eye, then replaced it with remarkable ease. He then turned swiftly, threw his long hands above his recumbent subject, and snapped his fingers.

The yellow assistant promptly sat up, dropped his feet to the floor, and gazed around the hall with wide unseeing eyes.

In hollow tones the professor spoke.

"You is a cannibal! You is sittin' on de side of a grave eatin' de bones of yo' gram'ma!"

Promptly the assistant reached down, made as if he broke off an arm or a leg, then began munching on it with relish.

Soon he paused, and with unexpected realism began picking his teeth.

The audience became seized with the animal magnetism of a moved crowd. Possibly vague ancestral memories of forest enemies, of painted voodoo men, of brown bodies gleaming in the firelit dance, stole into their transplanted brains. Some of them swayed slightly—others groaned. A rumble of thunder crossed the

sky. From the direction of the road came two quick reports, like revolver shots.

The tenseness of feeling transmitted itself to the stage. Lawyer called hoarsely:

"Anybody in de audience! Anybody in de audience! Jes' step dis way ef you wants de perfessor to conjure you. He gwine have ever'body hypnotized in a minute!"

The professor snapped his fingers in his assistant's face.

"You sees a lion!" cried the professor. "A wild roarin' lion. Dar he, comin' in de door!"

The assistant leaped to his feet, crouching low, his palms extended in horror, his eyes sticking out.

The audience watched him breathlessly. Some even glanced over their shoulders, so realistic was his acting. Fish Kelly and Lawyer Little, from their chairs at opposite edges of the footlights, watched him, too. When the yellow assistant had lain down voluntarily upon the ironing board off stage and had been carried out before the audience, Fish and Lawyer had concluded that the performance was a fake. Now they were not so sure. Lawyer peered with intent raised eyebrows over the top of his gold-rimmed spectacles, his fat, bacon-colored hands gripped tightly to-

gether across his pendulous greenish vest. Fish Kelly's eyes protruded so far that his eyeballs made two conspicuous spots against the blackness of his face. His long hands clutched the sides of his chair. His skinny shins and long feet were wrapped spirally around each other, as if for comfort. This unconscious absorption on the part of the two minor participants had a convincing effect upon the customers in the orchestra. Low moans arose from various parts of the hall.

But suddenly the audience grew quite still. A startling change had come over the occupants of the stage.

Lawyer Little had risen slowly from his chair, supporting himself with one hand against the wall. His palms lifted slowly out before him. His bacon-colored countenance became mottled, and showed amazement and terror.

Fish Kelly's mouth fell open. His black face faded to a leaden gray, while his popped eyes stared out over the audience. He seemed unable to move.

The assistant's knees sagged beneath him. He seemed to turn from yellow to cream white. With jaw dropped and eyes sticking out, he gazed at the door.

The professor—who had been facing the assistant—cocked his good eye curiously toward the rear of the hall. A peculiar change came at once over his face. He brushed his hand across his eyes. He blinked and repeated the gesture. Then he put his palms to his temples.

A blood-curdling roar reverberated from the rear of the hall, and the stage became abruptly animated. The assistant, the professor, and Lawyer Little dashed toward the exit. Fish Kelly sat perfectly still, as if petrified with fear.

The audience looked over its shoulder. Crouched within the doorway, like a mammoth yellow cat, was a real or imaginary lion. Its ears were laid back against its huge shaggy head. Its eyes glinted with an evil green fire above its bared white fangs. And its tufted tail lashed into the light of the room and back into the outer darkness.

Whether the lion was real or imaginary, the effect was the same. The audience became as leaves in an autumn wind. The distinction was lost between ladies and single ladies, between gentlemen who had escorted ladies and gentlemen who had arrived alone. The question of arrival had changed into one of departure.

As soon as Fish had recovered from his momentary paralysis, he leapt for the exit from the stage. But ahead of him were the other performers. Fish clawed at them desperately, and tried to climb over their struggling forms, which had become jammed in the narrow door. Of a sudden the whole group fell forward into the little off-stage room, an active mass of moving arms and legs. Fish scrambled over them and jerked at the door that led to the street. The doorknob came off in his hands. He caught at the crack with his fingers, but succeeded only in breaking his nails.

At that moment another tremendous roar swelled in the outer auditorium. It seemed to make the windows rattle and the very beams groan; to Fish, it sounded nearer than before. Lawyer Little had grasped him from behind, had thrown him feverishly aside, and was clawing frantically at the hermetically sealed doorway. The building trembled with a third horrific outburst, followed by a sort of moaning snarl. There was no doubt that the lion was approaching.

Fish remembered an open window on the other side of the auditorium. He did not crave to dash forth into the presence of the approaching beast, but his instinct liked still less the

thought of being hemmed into this tiny room when the animal should enter. He chose the lesser fear. Blind with terror, he shot from the little off-stage room like a black arrow from a bow, hearing even as he departed the crash of Lawyer's shoulder against the splintering door. He crossed the stage with a single step. A glimpse of the lion, now halfway up the room, lent wings to his flitting feet. He leaped from the stage, over the heads of the struggling audience and toward the opposite window, like an athlete from a spring-board.

He landed in the midst of a complicated mass of ladies and gentlemen. The general effect was of gentlemen who were trying to leave the place in their own way and unaccompanied, and of ladies who were endeavoring to accompany them by the expedient of clinging to the backs of their necks. Even in the heat of the moment Fish recognized a fat black lady who for years had been the victim of rheumatism. Many was the day he had seen her dragging her all but useless limbs, able to move at all only by the aid of a crutch. Under the spur of the occasion, however, she had undergone an amazing metamorphosis. She had utilized the crushing force of weight to press down the aspirations of several persons in

front of her, and at the moment she was displaying an astounding ability to mount roofward on the bodies of her victims. Fish's surprise at the change in her was quenched by the impact of a generous foot against his face. He went down, with several ladies and gentlemen on top, and a procession started across him.

Trying to protect his face with one arm, and his stomach with the other, Fish Kelly screamed a protest at this unnecessary cruelty. But his cries were lost in the multitude of similar exclamations that filled the air. Echoes filtered down to him in such breathless expressions as "Quit yo' holdin'!" or, "Leggo me, nigger, 'fo' I kill you!" And now and again, like an accompaniment to this discordant mêlée, the building would tremble with a heart-sickening roar.

Just when Fish thought he could stand the passing footprints no longer, they unexpectedly ceased. He scrambled brokenly to his feet. Ahead was an unscalable mass of struggling colored folk, endeavoring, by tearing each other's clothing and gouging each other's eyes, to squeeze fifty people through a window that was barely big enough for one. Fish glanced wildly behind him. To his astonish-

ment, that side of the hall was deserted. It held neither customers nor lion. The door at which the lion had entered was open and empty. No doubt, thought Fish, it had left the way it had come. There was no sign of Lawyer Little or the professor—they must have succeeded in crashing the stage exit door.

There was no telling, of course, at what moment the lion might leap into the room again; and there was no chance, for some time, of escaping through the near-by congested window. Fish bethought him of the open stage door. He moved rapidly toward it, avoiding overturned benches, stepping on ladies' hats and gentlemen's coats—even kicking an occasional necktie and collar. His own appearance was nothing to brag about. His coat sleeve was ripped from shoulder to cuff, footprints covered his body, and a trickle of red ran down his mottled gray cheek from a heel mark over his temple.

Just before he climbed up to the stage, Fish Kelly observed in the cockpit a box resembling the box in which Lawyer had carried his money. But at the same moment he heard, from somewhere, a peculiar animal-like sneeze. He did not care just then to take on additional weight. He scrambled over the footlights and

crossed the stage. But before he reached the off-stage room, he paused. It would be foolish to pass up this opportunity. The lion had probably gone for good. And even if it should return while he was in the cockpit after the money, he would still have time to scramble back upon the stage and escape through the broken stage door.

It occurred to him, however, that it would be best to make sure first that the stage exit door had really been broken open. He stepped to the off-stage room and peered in. The room was quite dark, and at first his eyes could see nothing. Then he made out that the door to the street was open. Lawyer and the others, then, had obviously escaped. But if the lion had departed, Lawyer would not be long in returning for his money. Just then Fish noticed a round brownish bulk moving between himself and the doorway.

"Is dat you, Lawyer?" he inquired.

In answer, from the darkness of the room before him, came a deafening roar. It was followed by the hurtling of a tremendous shaggy body. Fish leapt backward, but as he was turning to flee he felt against his side the impact of the beast. He was shot forward over the footlights—plunged for a sec-

ond through space, and struck with the side of his head a hard object that jingled. There was a flash of colored sparks before his eyes, a sound of roaring in his ears—and after that, darkness and silence.

It could not have been very long before he came to, because he could hear the retreating rumble of a cart or a cage, carrying with it the dwindling roars of a no longer free animal. He climbed dizzily to his feet, and his foot struck something that clinked. He picked it up. It was the small wooden box that Lawyer had carried as treasurer. The weight indicated that it still contained the thousand or the hundred dollars taken in for tickets.

Over the shocked grayish expression of Fish Kelly's thin face began to come a darker color and the glimmer of a smile. He tucked the box under one arm and hastened to the door. Here toward the right could be seen the lights of Huntersville, and against them a man's moving figure; possibly a returning treasurer in search of his treasure.

Fish trotted down the hedge-bound lane to the road, where he turned to the left and, keeping close to the concealing border of trees, made swiftly away. A wide detour brought him—a full hour later—to his small room on

Queen Street, and there he stowed away his fortune in a hole that he dug in the mattress. He climbed into bed, and lay there with his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes on the ceiling, and his prominent white teeth gleaming in an expansive grin.

Luck at last had chosen him for her own. Many had been the tribulations he had suffered, but now all that was ended. He had money enough to keep himself independent until such time as he might choose to work. He could buy himself a suit, and some fancy socks, and travel down to see his folks at Newbern. Lawyer Little had tried to cheat him, but luck had set things right. Now he was no longer that gentleman's cat's-paw. No longer, just to keep body and soul together, was it necessary to risk his life and limbs in pursuit of that gentleman's schemes. Mister Lincoln had set the niggers free, but had left Fish Kelly in slavery. To-night was the night of a new emancipation. Fish Kelly, at last, was his own nigger, beholden to nobody but himself.

Fish Kelly began to dream dreams. Surely it was not intended that he should live forever by the skin of his teeth. Surely some day he would have, perhaps, a little business of his

own, and somebody waiting for him when he came home of an evening. He tried to think of what she would look like, but could summon up only a pair of big brown eyes. Those brown eyes gazed upon him tenderly as he drifted off to sleep.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ENTER LOVE

FISH went to sleep with a calm joy flooding his breast, and he awoke the next morning in the same frame of mind. The sun lay in a bright triangle of gold on the plank floor of his room. On a twig of the maple tree outside the window a little cedar bird—canary yellow with greenish wings—flicked its tail and watched him with bright brown eyes, as if it had flown in from the swamps to make merry with him on this glorious morning. A mouse poked its sharp gray head from a hole in the corner, then ran out with quick tiny steps, stopped, sat up on its haunches, and regarded him with black friendly eyes, turning its head from side to side and wiggling its infinitesimal nose and whiskers.

Fish grinned companionably at the mouse, and got up, feeling in his bosom that something wonderful was about to happen. He dressed, stuffed his fortune of greenbacks and silver

into his pocket, and went down the stairs to the pleasant sunshine of the street. The first concern of the morning, of course, must be food, but the dark commonplace cavern of the Liberty Lunch Room, across the way, did not lure his stomach. He wanted plenty and variety, and it occurred to him that it would be a noble procedure to load himself with delicacies at Mr. Greenberg's delicatessen, and take them across for a prompt and flavorous cooking. So, with his hand protectively over his fortune in his pocket, he strolled to his right till he reached the portals of Mr. Greenberg's store. He went in the doorway and looked about him, but his mind became practically useless in the midst of so unlimited a presentment of delights.

Mr. Greenberg labeled his establishment a delicatessen, but with almost equal warrant it could have been called a department store. As Ted Harpy once had aptly remarked: "Dat man sell you eve'thing but a street car." On either side of the doorway hung a bunch of bananas, one red and one yellow. At the far rear of the shop, beneath an inverted white lighted globe, Mr. Greenberg, in a red-smeared apron, presided in front of a meat refrigerator of glass and porcelain, in which—visible to the

eye—were sides of bacon, legs of beef and mutton, tubs of sausage meat and tubs of yellow butter. Between Mr. Greenberg, in the rear, and the bananas in the front, was almost anything that the heart could desire.

Fish licked his lips and stared about him, not knowing where to begin. He passed by the show case of chewing tobacco, corncob pipes, cigars and cigarettes, and the adjoining array of clocks and watches and rings. He looked up to the shelves, laden with canned milk, pickles, preserves and olives; canned peaches, potted ham, veal loaf, and ginger ale. But canned goods were his daily food—to-day was a day of feasting. His attention was drawn by an insinuating gobble, and he gazed fondly upon the red head and scrawny neck of a turkey that had thrust itself half through the wires of its crate on the sawdust of the floor. But a turkey was too large for breakfast—his eyes wandered to the three buckets of eggs that stood upon the counter. Fish could not read, but he knew from hearsay how the legends on the three buckets ran. The first was labeled "Warranted Fine Fresh Eggs." The second, "Best Storage Eggs." And the third, "Eggs." He had had experience before with the "Eggs."

This time he would buy the Warranted Fresh.

But somehow, on this particular morning, there seemed a lack of the romantic and adventurous about the purchase of eggs. Fish leaned against a barrel of spinach, crossed his feet and thought. In the rear of the store the stout Mr. Greenberg, a meat cleaver in each hand, was turning out a mess of hamburger steak, making a remarkably rapid and rhythmical *rat-a-tat-tat* upon the round meat block. Over Mr. Greenberg's head was a sign that many unsought translations had ingrained into Fish Kelly's memory

**IN GOD WE TRUST**
**ALL OTHERS PAY CASH**

So the sign read, and it had a companion piece upon the opposite wall.

**OUR CREDIT MAN IS OUT COLLECTING**

But these invidious insinuations made no impress upon Fish to-day. He floated above them, up into that happy realm of the epicure, who has only to consult his palate. He

glanced, without inspiration, at the barrels of sugar, flour and meal behind the counter. And then he slowly uncrossed his feet and opened his eyes.

Mr. Greenberg had somebody new to help him.

She came from the open court in back of the store and faced Mr. Kelly with a professionally inquiring look from behind the counter. Her skin, beneath her high-coiled glossy hair, was what Mr. Fish would have called "high yaller," it was a creamy olive brown. Her nose was delicately formed, her oval face rounded and soft, and her dark eyes were large and tender. A clean blue-and-white-checked apron covered her blue silk skirt, and the sleeves of her filmy orange blouse were rolled up, disclosing her slim but shapely arms. Fish saw at once that she was not of common clay. His heart thumped loudly. A fine perspiration broke out upon his brow. He wanted suddenly to buy a great deal of something, to impress her, but no word would come to his mind.

"Somethin' for you?" the vision inquired, and her voice, so kind and soft, was accompanied by a dazzling smile. Fish Kelly realized, all at once, that the something wonderful

he had been expecting had at last occurred. That smile thrilled him. It made him feel as if an angel had unexpectedly poured molasses down his back. His protruding eyes finally tore themselves from this thing of beauty and looked for something to buy.

"Salmon," he said—not because he wanted salmon, but because a can of salmon had floated before him.

"How many?" the vision asked, with a lilting note of inquiry.

Fish desired to impress her.

"A dozen," he said, and observed that he had succeeded. "You better make it two dozen," he added, pushing his luck.

She reached gracefully up to the shelves, drew down two by two the cans of salmon, and slid them forward on the counter. Fish produced his roll of bills with a swaying ostentatious flourish that involved his whole body, and laid a ten-dollar greenback upon the counter.

"Take it out of dat, lady, please."

Mr. Greenberg, who had been watching the clearance of his shelf with some misgivings, came forward and stood looking on with a meat cleaver in each hand. But seeing that legal tender was coming in before his goods

went out, he retired to his hamburger steak with a puzzled expression upon his aquiline florid face. What could anybody want with two dozen cans of salmon? Fish, meanwhile, had eyes for nothing except the charmer, and he watched her silently while she made the change. Then—

"I reckon you better make it another dozen cans of salmon," he said nonchalantly, and waited for her expression of surprise. But she merely leaned, with her hands on the counter, and smiled at him.

"You already got a powerful lot of salmon. Dat stuff go a long way. Course it depend on how many folks gwine eat it."

"Only one, lady. Dey ain't but one. Dat's all, lady. Jes' me."

"You got 'nuff salmon dere," opined the vision, "to las' you till de day of judgmint."

Fish Kelly cackled nervously.

"I is got a powerful lot, ain't I?" he asked, as if he had just observed it. "I eats a lot of salmon, though," he went on recklessly. The fact was, he had never liked salmon. "I reckon I eats mo' salmon dan any other man."

She did not seem to be much impressed at that. "Do you want some other things to go with it?" she inquired.

"Yes, lady," answered Fish in something of a daze. He had always been susceptible to feminine charms, but his susceptibility in the past had been tempered by a fear of feminine wrath. No such kind and gentle creature had ever entered his life before. He felt that she was there to stay. "I'll take anything you say, lady," he added with feeling.

The lady brought him a plaited basket into which he put his salmon while she, after learning that he wanted subsistence for several days, assembled an appropriate quantity of eggs and potatoes, spinach and ham. Fish was delighted at thus prolonging this happy contact of a mortal with a goddess. The dreams that he had dreamed the night before seemed almost upon the verge of coming true. What if he could manage, himself, to start a store, or a restaurant, and employ this wonderful vision to assist him in its care. That was not an impossible thought. And, after they had worked together for a while, it was not impossible to think that they might become more than friends. He paid for his purchases and watched her in fascination while she expertly counted the change. He was fairly wallowing in happiness—and he was pro-

portionately pained when a familiar voice broke in upon his attention.

"Fish Kelly, I wants to talk wid you!"

It was Lawyer Little, a stern expression upon his bacon-colored face.

"I'll come back for dese vittles," Fish informed the goddess, and with his heart in his throat he followed Mr. Little from the store.

Lawyer waddled silently down the street. Fish, following at the flapping tails of that shiny-greenish coat, planned to dismiss this burly person with a few harsh words. But Lawyer did not speak until they had passed through the fragrant barroom and were seated at a table in the gloom of the deserted back room of Hammer John's saloon. By then the uncertainty of this sustained silence had worn Fish's resolution to tatters. Perhaps his conscience was not too easy about the way he had acquired his present wealth. At any rate, when you have been dominated by a quick-witted, quick-fisted gentleman for several years, it is not easy of a sudden to adopt with him an attitude of moral confidence and equality. So instead of speaking out haughtily, Fish slid low in his chair, pouted his long lips in sullen foreboding, and slowly opened and closed his prominent eyes. His heart sank

lower as Lawyer drew from his pocket a pack of grimy and greasy cards.

"How 'bout a few cold han's?" Mr. Little inquired casually.

Fish's Adam's apple moved up and down as he swallowed with a dry throat. It was typical of Lawyer that—whatever may have been his opinion as to the manner in which Fish had acquired his plethora of dollar bills—he did not rouse open opposition by issuing a challenge. Fish could fight in the open—but this left-handed approach found his guilty conscience at a loss. He didn't want to play cards for money with Lawyer. He had done it before. But the very presence of the money in his pocket made him afraid to object.

"Ten dollars a han'," said Lawyer, and while Fish hesitated, Lawyer dealt the cards. His manner of dealing was, to say the least, peculiar. He kept the pack of cards out of sight beneath the table. He dealt slowly. Sometimes he would look down and his arms would move as though he were turning over cards and examining them. Fish was somewhat relieved, therefore, to observe that, so far as the dealing had progressed, he had the better hand.

Neither hand had a pair, but while Lawyer's

highest card was only a jack, Fish had a king and a queen. Fish leaned forward, his teeth gleaming momentarily against the sullen blackness of his face. Lawyer looked down at the cards in his lap. His arms moved.

"Whyn't you put dem cyards up whar folks kin see 'em?"

Lawyer's lip moved as he concentrated upon turning over the cards in his lap. Then he dealt himself a fifth card. It was the ace of spades.

"Ace higher dan a king," announced the stout gentleman. "Dat's ten dollars I wins. Better pay it now."

"Ain't gwine pay you nothin'," said Fish. "Dat ain't no way to deal cyards. I didn't ast nobody to play cyards, nohow."

Lawyer Little dropped the cards on the table, took out and put on pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. He let the spectacles slide down to the end of his flat shiny nose, tilted his head and looked over them at Fish with raised eyebrows.

"You sho' is a funny nigger," the fat, bacon-colored gentleman remarked. "Here I is tryin' my best to keep you out o' jail an'. . . ."

"Jail!" Fish interrupted. "What sort of jail?"

Lawyer Little drew in the corners of his mouth, shook his head, and sighed.

"Fish," he said with a fine imitation of sad disapproval, "how many folks you think seen you take dat money? Now, I'se yo' frien'. I ain't takin' you' off to jail. Not yit. I ain't said nothin' to Police Officer Johnsing. Not yit, I ain't. I's jes' givin' you a chanct to have a li'l' fun, spoht an' amusement. An' look at de way you ack!" The pain and reproach in Lawyer's voice was almost touching.

Fish was unmoved by the pain and reproach. He knew them both to be spurious. But a part of Lawyer's discourse had made a deep mark on his mind. What if Lawyer should have him arrested? Yesterday the idea would have left him cold. To-day was different. His heart could not bear the prospect of passing by Mr. Greenberg's delicatessen in the clutch of Police Officer Johnson. Better poverty—better even death, than that. He pulled out a ten-dollar bill and shoved it across the moist wooden table.

"Here yo' money," he said, and found that he could hardly speak. His throat ached him as his dreams of affluence faded darkly away.

"Dat de way to ack," said Lawyer cheerfully. "De nex' han' is for twenty dollars."

In a state of utter dejection, Fish watched the game march forward to its foregone conclusion. The only bright spot on the horizon was the fact that he had purchased enough food to last him perhaps a week—and enough salmon to last him forever.

At the end of this little social game, Lawyer stretched himself, yawned, and rapped on the table.

"Now I'll buy you a drink," he offered generously.

Fish, like a black shadow with white eyes, pouted his long lips and blinked; tried to plot some grandiloquent conquest of this domineering buccaneer. But Lawyer, reading his thoughts, interrupted.

"Seen you projeckin' roun' dat li'l' yaller fever down at de sto'," he sneered. "What you think you is, anyway? Don't you know dat gal is de daughter of Lawyer Clinton?"

Fish's heart sank deeper in his breast. Mr. Clinton was the Napoleon of the colored section of the city. Not only was he a genuine lawyer, with an office and his name on the door, but he lived in a house almost as big as white folks', in the best colored section of Huntersville, and he drove to and from his business in a little closed car.

"If she his daughter, how come she waitin' in a sto'?" demanded Fish, hoping to be able to confute this hateful rumor.

"Dey is two reasons," answered Lawyer, who somehow seemed always informed of other people's affairs. "First place her daddy don't let none of dese black skins come to see her, an' she tired settin' roun' all day wid nothin' to do. Second place, Mr. Clinton he loaned Mr. Greenberg some money, an' he 'lowed it wouldn't do no harm to have his daughter in dere as cashier to see do he git his share of de profits."

There seemed no flaw in this argument. Fish drank his drink and moodily rested his chin upon his prominent Adam's apple.

"You want to make some money?" asked Lawyer suddenly, feeling that the occasion was opportune.

Fish opened and shut his prominent eyes.

"Meet me to-morrow evenin' at two o'clock at Undertaker Williams's shop."

"What you want to meet at a place like dat for?" objected Fish.

"You waits till you git dere," instructed Lawyer, chuckling.

## CHAPTER IX

### FLIRTING WITH DEATH

FISH pushed back his chair and went moodily out into the sunlight of the street. Life had taken on a different hue since the morning. He shuffled mournfully up the street to Mr. Greenberg's. The beautiful Miss Clinton was in the rear of the store, so Mr. Kelly took up his basket of food, hooked it on his arm, and leaning to one side made his way again to the street and up the two flights of stairs to his room. Here he sat morosely, like a black shadow with blinking white eyes, until the pangs of hunger called him across the street to the Liberty Lunch Room. He ate with an appetite sharpened by sorrow and love, and then once more sought the seclusion of his room.

The next morning for breakfast he sallied forth again, but returned at once to enjoy the melancholy of his thoughts. He couldn't bear to see Miss Clinton in this mood. He felt that even to approach her, he had to appear success-

ful. So, around two o'clock, he went down the street to Mr. Williams's undertaking parlors. Perhaps, for once, Lawyer Little's scheme would turn out to be profitable for his associates.

He found Lawyer and Mr. Williams already assembled and discussing their plans. After a little while Mr. Little waddled out into the street and took a glance at the afternoon sky. He returned to the black-and-purple parlor, salvaged his greasy opera hat from where it lay bottom up on the floor, and grinned broadly.

"Well," he suggested jovially to Fish Kelly and Undertaker Williams, who were sitting about in dejected attitudes, "reckon it's about time we-all went for de remains."

Fish moved his skinny black frame uneasily.

"I don't like dis here funny business. De good Lawd ain't never meant for nobody to be projeckin' wid dead folks."

"Who projeckin' wid dead folks?" demanded Lawyer in a high voice of pained surprise.

"Well, you projeckin' wid coffins."

"Coffins ain't dead folks, is dey?"

"If dey ain't dead folks," Fish persisted

stubbornly, "it's jest because dey ain't got nobody in 'em."

Lawyer snorted in speechless irritation.

Undertaker Williams, a yellow, square-shouldered man with a sparse beard and startled, jaundiced eyes, rose, buttoning his long frock coat, and went to the back door.

"Bohemia!" he yelled. "You Bohemia! Hitch up dat No. 2 hearse an' drive her out."

Bohemia, a short barefooted lad of perhaps fourteen years ceased playing the harmonica softly into his cupped palms, and ambled toward the stable. His complexion was composed of brown specks on yellow—like cinnamon toast—and the top of his long head was entirely flat. He wore a pair of some very large man's trousers that had been cut off just below the seat and attached to his dirty brown shirt by a safety pin in the rear and a nail in front. They hung halfway down his sharp bare shins—which curved out in front of him like sabers—and gave the effect of a sort of pantie-petticoat that swung interestingly here and there with the movements of his body.

"Thought you say No. 1 ride easier," objected Lawyer.

"No. 1 it got Cop Johnson's cousin in it."

"Stella Johnson?"

"Yeah. I got drive her out to his house soon's we come back. Gwine be a big lodge funeral up dar to-night."

Lawyer Little laughed and slapped his thigh.

"Looks like dat's a good thing for us, ain't it, boy? He won't be a huntin' trouble to-night much."

" 'Pears like it's a bad sign, to me," mumbled Fish, rolling his white eyeballs in his black face. "He a bad nigger. He a white-man's nigger."

"Dat uniform don't scare me none," retorted Lawyer. "Ever'body run from him jes' 'cause he killed a bootlegger wid his night-stick. I ain't skeered o' no nigger, wid or widout a uniform. What you kickin' me for?" he demanded fiercely of Undertaker.

Undertaker's expression was sufficiently explanatory, and Lawyer turned hastily to find the big blue-uniformed bulk of Officer Johnson in the doorway.

With his suavest bow and most ingratiating smile Lawyer brushed off a chair for Mr. Johnson with the tail of his green-black coat.

"Come in, Ossifer. Come in an' set down here an' take de weight off yo' feet. We was

jes' sayin' as how sorry we is 'bout yo' bereavement."

"Here to-day an' gone to-morrow," remarked Undertaker, with the sympathetic wisdom of one who has seen many passings.

"Praise de Lawd!" echoed Lawyer piously.

Their welcomings broke weakly upon Officer Johnson's cold and unbending demeanor. Big of chest, with graying hair beneath his helmet, and a square, crisp moustache, he resembled a chocolate bust of General Pershing.

"I wants dem remains to be up to de house at eight o'clock sharp," he boomed sternly at Undertaker. "I ain't got no room for 'em befo' den, and I don't want 'em to come no later."

"Dey shall be dar, suh. Dey shall be dar."

The representative of law and order was turning to depart, when Fish Kelly spoke up weakly.

"Ossifer Johnsing," he inquired, nervously swallowing his prominent Adam's apple, "how come dat dark stain on yo' club?"

With tolerant dignity the officer raised his club and glanced at the dark stain, while Fish Kelly's eyes followed it as if hypnotized. The suspicion of a significant smile appeared on his stern lips as the big man next looked steadily in turn at Lawyer and Undertaker Wil-

liams and, finally, at Fish. The three seemed to shrivel beneath that soul-reading gaze. Then, without a word, the officer departed.

It was Fish who broke the uncomfortable silence.

"I know whar he got dat stain."

"Whar at?" demanded Lawyer with deep interest.

"Killin' 'em bootleggers. Dey tells me he killed two of 'em wid one lick."

Another uncomfortable silence descended. It was shattered in a startling and disturbing manner by Bohemia, the half-witted colored boy, who thrust his head in at the back door before they had seen him, and shouted:

"De hearse is ready!"

The omen wrapped up in this announcement was not lost upon Fish. He elongated his ebon frame and put on his black felt hat.

"I'se through!" he announced feelingly. "You kin send dat hearse for some other nigger."

Lawyer himself was somewhat shaken, but he could not see this defection from the ranks. "What's matter wit' chu?" he demanded.

"I'se through. Dat's all. I'se gwine 'way from here."

"Whar you gwine? You knows you can't make no livin' widout me to show you."

"If I got to git killed to make a livin'," returned Fish, "I don't want to make no livin'."

The unanswerable arguments that Fish sometimes put forward invariably infuriated Lawyer.

"You git out dar an' climb on dat hearse," he commanded as he advanced threateningly. "Don't, I'se gwine pick up sump'n' an' bus' you open!"

Fish yielded weakly to the threat of force and climbed onto the hearse that waited in the driveway. Mr. Williams already held the reins, and as soon as Lawyer clambered puffily up beside them the somber equipage rolled out into the street.

Drawn by a thin yellow horse which rakishly sported a black plume over one ear, they passed Officer Johnson at the intersection of Church and Nicholson Streets. Impressed by their melancholy trappings, he vouchsafed them a dignified salute. Several blocks farther on they turned into the swamp road, and Undertaker encouraged the horse to a spanking gait.

"Do he expect us?" inquired Lawyer, as they

crossed the whitewashed bridge that marked the County line.

"Yeah. I seen him yestiddy," assured Undertaker.

"Wish I warn't in dis business," muttered Fish Kelly gloomily.

"You shet up 'fo' I cut you open," threatened Lawyer to this raven perched upon the shoulder of Adventure. "You ain't never satisfied."

"Dar he now," Undertaker said.

A colored gentleman in pink shirt sleeves was standing on the stoop of an unpainted dwelling. Above his head swung a newly painted sign.

HAMMER JOHN'S HOTEL

Just across the County line
Open for business all the time

"Hello dar, Hammer," cried Lawyer jovially.

The gentleman addressed made a silencing gesture and looked cautiously up and down the untenanted country road.

"Drive her roun' to de back," he directed.

Undertaker swung into the indicated drive-

way and at the rear of the house maneuvered into a loading position at the doorway with professional skill.

The three adventurers dismounted. Undertaker opened the door of the hearse, and he and Lawyer slid the oblong black box on to the loading platform and then carried it into the barroom. Fish, his thin black frame clad in flapping raiment of the same hue as himself, trailed along behind as if overcome by the prescience of doom. The actual carrying out of the risky schemes by which he and Lawyer Little eked out a precarious livelihood always threw him into the depths of despondency.

"Hurry up an' load dis here thing," grumbled Hammer John, with obvious distaste. "I don't like no playin' wid de dead."

"Dat's what I tells 'em," agreed Fish.

"Dat's what you tells us?" cried Lawyer, as he began standing quart bottles in the box, while Hammer filled in between them with sawdust. "Why, you is de very nigger what thought whar to hide dis stuff."

"Whar you gwine hide it?" inquired Hammer. "Believe me, boy, dat Cop Johnson can smell bootleg likker on you across the road. He can tell from de way a fly flies out of de

parlor window whether dere's likker in de cellar."

Lawyer cackled.

"He have do better dan dat to find dis likker."

Undertaker laughed loudly, and even Fish Kelly showed a gleam of white teeth.

"Whar you gwine hide it?"

"Uh-umm! Ne' mind!" chuckled Lawyer. "Cop Johnson be dead nigger 'fo' he ever find dis likker."

At this both Undertaker and Fish laughed heartily, striking each other on the back.

When the box was filled to capacity and sawdust had been packed in between the upstanding bottles, Undertaker screwed the top on, then they carefully dusted off the sawdust, and the four men carried the camouflaged cargo outside and slid it into the hearse.

"Dis mighty thirsty work," suggested Lawyer.

"It sho' is," agreed Undertaker and Fish in unison.

" 'Pears to me like we might as well open up one of dem other quarts right now."

"Dat's de way I thinks it," chuckled Undertaker, leading the way to the bar.

"Since dem November 'lections," grinned

Lawyer as he tossed off a glass raw, "my right foot he jes' been feelin' all over de city for a railin' to rest on."

"Ain't gwine need no railin' when we git dese remains in town," returned Undertaker. "We gwine make a powerful lot of money out of dat coffin full of heaben."

"Nigger, you said it!"

Fish rolled his white eyes over the rim of his glass. "If we don't git 'way from here," he observed gloomily, "gwine have Cop Johnson meet us lookin' for his cousin."

"Man, dat's de first smart thing I ever hear dat nigger say," agreed Lawyer, who was in high good humor from his libations.

"He always bustin' up a party," growled Undertaker, throwing a jaundiced glance at Fish.

"Likker always make you want to fight," reproved Lawyer, leading Undertaker out to the hearse. "I don't see what make you drink it."

The three climbed again into the driver's seat and Undertaker drove them silently back to the city.

"Jes' occurred to me," mentioned Fish, as they drew near to where Officer Johnson was stationed, "S'pose one of dem bottles is

leakin?" How you ever gwine git de smell off'n de coffins"

"You hit him," suggested Undertaker. "I'se drivin'."

"I'se tryin' to help you, nigger," retorted Fish belligerently from his safe position behind Lawyer's bulk. "I done got a idea."

"What 'tis?"

"You git 'bout a dime's worth of Limburger cheese," explained Fish with the inventor's enthusiasm, "an' jes' smear it all over whar de likker been drippin'. Can't nobody tell den."

"He's tryin' to ruin my business!" cried Undertaker. He dropped the reins and made a vicious swing at the innocent inventor.

"Sit down! Sit down!" cried Lawyer. "Dar Ossifer Johnson now!"

Undertaker resumed the reins, muttering angrily to himself; and Fish from his corner murmured unintelligble arguments in return, his lips stuck out and his eyes snapping.

They drew themselves erect and tried to look bereaved as they approached the corner where Officer Johnson ruled majestically with his scepter of darkly stained wood. Each endeavored to express upon his brown or black and naturally expressionless countenance the proper solemnity due to the present errand,

and the exact shade of respectful appreciation of Cop Johnson's position as chief mourner that night at a lodge funeral. The three expressions rapidly changed as the officer signaled them to stop for an interview.

"Great Gawd!" breathed Fish, "dat nigger done smelled us!"

"I want to tell you," said Officer Johnson as he reached the side of the vehicle, "don't fail me at eight o'clock."

"Naw, *suh*!" answered Undertaker, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Who you got in dar?" inquired the officer, pointing to the carved wooden curtains.

Lawyer and Undertaker and Fish were almost petrified with fear.

"Colored man from down the county," stammered Undertaker.

"What he die from?"

"He die from—"

"From rheumatism," put in Fish Kelly, as Undertaker hesitated.

"Praise de Lawd!" murmured Cop Johnson piously, as he returned to his station.

Undertaker urged the yellow horse to a trot and they soon reached the black frame building with purple curtains at the windows. Bohemia was seated on the curbstone of the

driveway, playing a heart-breaking melody on a mouth organ.

"It too light for us to be a-takin' dis likker out dar now," said Undertaker. "Bohemia! Unhitch dis horse an' wash off de hearse. An' give him sump'n' t' eat."

"Dat's what I wants," remarked Lawyer.

"Me an' you both," agreed Fish. "You got any money?"

"Yeah. I got some money."

"I'll go wid you," offered Undertaker, who had heard Lawyer's unguarded remark.

As they were starting off for the Liberty Lunch Room Undertaker turned to Bohemia, who was about to lead the equipage into the driveway.

"If you opens dat hearse door," warned Undertaker, "dat sperrit gwine come out an' ha'nt you."

This paralyzing idea deprived Bohemia of all repartee. He stood with the harmonica arrested halfway to his open mouth. The three adventurers looked back as they turned into the lunch room, and he was still standing in the same attitude.

Seated at the table covered with red oilcloth, and faced by a cold mess of boiled greens with bacon, the three colored gentlemen re-

signed conversation and devoted themselves to the efficient use of steel knives with yellow bone handles. But after they had proceeded to the point where it was necessary to pursue isolated slivers of green leaf with the flexible blade, their attention descended to less serious affairs.

"You got dat key?" inquired Lawyer suddenly.

Fish picked his soft black hat from the floor and felt inside the sweat band.

"Yeah."

"Good thing to have a friend what's Seckertary of de African Livin' and Dead Society," Lawyer chuckled.

"Good thing to have a friend what's a undertaker," added Fish, to be conciliatory.

"How we gwine do dis thing?" inquired Lawyer of Mr. Williams.

Undertaker took out three cigars, selected one of them, and returned the other two to his pocket.

"You leave it to me," he directed, lighting up. "I'll fix it."

As he was the owner of the yellow horse and the hearse, the other two sat back in their chairs and left it to him. He smoked on with

jaundiced solemnity, occasionally scratching his sparse black beard.

"Reckon we better start," he said finally, after Lawyer had paid for the repast. "Gittin' kinder dark outside."

They strolled back to the black-and-purple undertaking establishment, and Mr. Williams yelled from the rear door:

"You Bohemia! Hitch up dat No. 2 hearse an' bring her out here. An' don't make no mistake an' hitch up No. 1.—Las' week," he added to his two compatriots, "dat nigger hitched me up a empty hearse for a funeral. I had to run dat yaller horse ragged gittin' back here for de body."

Bohemia was not a rapid hitcher. Dusk was turning to darkness before he led the yellow horse through the shadow of the arched driveway. A keen eye would have been needed to tell whether the hearse was No. 1 or No. 2.

"We ain't gwine drive out dar an' den git back in time for de Johnson's funeral, is we?" inquired Lawyer.

"Git in," was Mr. William's rejoinder.

The three mounted the seat again, and Undertaker drove them along the evening streets. On the corners, arc lamps were beginning to sputter into pale blue globes of

light. They turned to the left at Church Street and proceeded at a solemn pace through the teeming colored section of Huntersville. Colored ladies were beginning to arrive home from a day of cooking for the white folks—capacious bundles of provisions clutched beneath concealing shawls. Colored gentlemen sat thoughtfully upon doorsteps, staying their stomachs until dinner time by chewing on Red Mule plug. Other colored gentlemen were drifting by ones and twos through mysterious swinging doors, perhaps in search of a heartening nip of gin. Lights popped on within the rickety wooden houses. Cats slunk with gleaming eyes across the road, or sat in secluded darkness and conducted a mournfully combative courtship. All about the adventurers was the homely sound, sight and aroma of their fellow man. Too soon they left it behind and emerged into the quiet unlighted road that led to the Gate of Heaven Cemetery.

Fish Kelly stirred uneasily in his outside seat next to Lawyer Little.

"Mr. Williams," he said, "you take dis here key. I jes' remember I got to meet a man."

"What's matter wit' chu?" inquired Undertaker angrily.

In the gloom, all of Fish was lost against the black background of the hearse except his large white eyeballs.

"I don't like no cimetery," answered Fish with feeling. "I don't like it no time, but after dark I ain't never lost nothin' in it."

"Whose idea was dis?" demanded Mr. Williams.

"Look here, nigger," interposed Lawyer, on whose nerves and superstition their destination had also begun to tell, "you's always talkin' voodoo talk at de wrong time. We ain't got but one place to hide dis likker, an' dar's whar we gwine hide it. I don't like a cimetery neither, but 'tain't no use makin' things worse dan dey is."

"Can't nothin' be no worse dan a cimetery."

"Nigger," said Lawyer Little with intense seriousness—his teeth were chattering a little —"If you say one more word 'bout cimeteries I gwine kill you right whar you set."

"Dat's way talk to him," Mr. Williams encouraged.

The tall iron gates of the cemetery, wide open, rose suddenly before them, and the wheels began to gird against the cinders of the cemetery road. Undertaker touched up the yellow horse, who drew them steadily over

the crest of the small hill toward the new mausoleum, recently erected by the African Living and Dead Society. Gaunt trees, shed of their summer clothing, stretched stark limbs in agonized attitudes toward the sullen bowl of sky. Insidious vapors, like trailing robes, inwreathed and changed along the tomb-dotted undulations. The night was utterly quiet except for the raucous, irreverent crunching of their wheels and the squeaking of the rear axle. Ghostlike monuments appeared and were lost suddenly in the deceptive vision of night. A cold breath, as if from the caverns of the dead, came to meet them, and chills of primal foreboding crawled along the spines of Lawyer Little and Fish Kelly. They found a huge comfort in the presence of Undertaker. He, at any rate, they figured, was experienced in the ways of the dead. And he was not frightened.

"What dat?" inquired Fish suddenly.

Lawyer trembled violently.

"What what?" he asked hoarsely.

"Thought I seen somethin'," whispered Fish.

"What it was?"

"Somethin' white!"

With inexplicable cheerfulness, Undertaker

interrupted the conversation that was so rapidly approaching a climax.

"You ain't gwine see nothin' white in a nigger cimetery," he chuckled.

Lawyer and Fish were not convinced. They sat close to each other and sweated coldly.

"Here 'tis," announced Mr. Williams. He swung the vehicle around and backed up before the arched brick dome of the new Society mausoleum, dimly discernible as a dark mound. "Let's git dis job done quick," he finished.

The three men descended stiffly. Mr. Williams opened the hearse door, and they slid forth the black box and deposited it before the tomb.

Mr. Williams closed the hearse and climbed back up on the driver's seat.

"When you-all git through," he leaned out and announced, "I'll meet you at de office."

"Whar you think you gwine?" demanded Lawyer quickly.

"I got to git back an' take dem remains to Cop Johnson's house," explained Undertaker. "It's 'most eight o'clock now." He cut the yellow horse across the flank.

"Wait!" cried Fish Kelly.

## CHAPTER X

### SLOW MUSIC

BUT Mr. Williams gave the homeward-bound horse another lash and quickly drew out of reach.

"Feared of jes' a box full of likker," he chuckled.

It had been intended that several bottles should be brought into town that night for surreptitious sale, and Mr. Williams was very glad to be escaping this risky detail.

He rattled cheerfully along the road to town and did not assume a more decorous gait until well within the precincts of Huntersville. Then, after several blocks of slow travel, he reached the black-and-purple house of Williams. In the office, Bohemia sat cross-legged on an easy-chair and by the light of a smoking oil lamp rendered upon the ever-faithful mouth organ his own interpretation of Chopin's funeral march. Bohemia's music was much more funereal than Chopin's, and Mr. Williams interrupted him without ruth.

"Git out dar," he shouted, "an' change dis horse over to the other hearse. I got to be at Cop Johnson's house in fifteen minutes!"

As Bohemia scuttled forth, Undertaker removed a large Bible from the curtained bookshelf on the wall and, making sure that he could not be observed from the street, drew down a pint bottle from the niche. He took three generous swallows. He restored the bottle and the Bible, unfastened one button of his long frock coat and secured a clove from his vest pocket. He rebuttoned his coat and brushed it off carefully with his hands. Then he went forth and helped Bohemia with the hitching, to the effect that within a very short while he was backing the other hearse, containing the remains of Stella Johnson, up to the curb in front of Officer Johnson's house on Nicholson Street.

It had been the unique plan of Policeman Johnson to entertain a few of the higher officers of the lodge at a mourning supper, and at its close to usher in the central figure and the commoner participants. So, as Mr. Williams arrived, the feasted officers came forth, in various habiliments of somber grandeur, and made short shrift of the labor of conveying the central figure from the vehicle to the par-

lor, where it was deposited for the viewing and for the religious service upon two draped carpenter's horses in the middle of the floor.

Close packed against the walls, like a hundred-headed dragon, the ogling crowd of mourners entwined itself about the silent black box while Mr. Williams, with professional celerity, proceeded to unscrew the four ends.

As Undertaker worked, not unaware of the dramatic possibilities of his part in the service, Officer Johnson and a bespectacled old preacher pushed in from the hall and attained a position at the head of the black box, where they stood in solemn anticipation. But the proximity of the officer of the law no longer caused Mr. Williams to tremble. He realized that he, himself, more even than the preacher at that moment, was the dominant figure in the assembly. Besides, he had three fingers of firewater lying comfortably against his ribs. So, having removed the final screw, he lifted the top of the black box, and as he did so watched with an almost superior curiosity to see whether Officer Johnson evinced any uneasiness at this nearness of the dead.

Indeed, Officer Johnson's expression was well worth observing. His mouth opened, his eyes seemed to start forth from their sockets.

He grasped, as if for support, at the preacher's arm. Undertaker glanced about the room. Officer Johnson's expression was duplicated on every face. Then Mr. Williams looked in the box, and understood.

The brown mouths of innumerable bottles, freshly corked, protruded slightly through their level bedding of clean sawdust. They and their bedding filled the box from end to end.

The silence in the room was terrific. In that gathering, reason and superstition raced with each other to touch the goal of explanation. Even Undertaker, who should have held the key, thought for a moment that his mind was gone. Then he suddenly realized that Bohemia had hitched up the wrong vehicles.

He looked up and saw Police Officer Johnson creeping toward him as a cat creeps toward a bird.

Perhaps in the sensations of that moment Undertaker expiated for having deserted Lawyer Little and Fish Kelly at the ghoulish mausoleum.

But the minds of Fish and Lawyer were occupied with more pressing problems than

retribution, unless it should be retribution upon themselves.

"He gone," said Fish with unutterable despair, as the yellow horse flitted away in the darkness.

They stood quite still and listened for several moments until the fleeing hearse could no longer be heard. Then the myriad small voices of the night rose from the populated field and seemed to draw nearer and close in upon them. Lawyer tried to speak firmly, but could emit only a whisper.

"Is you got de key?"

"You think I gwine to open dat place?" Fish whispered fiercely.

"Give it to me den."

Fish found the key in his hat and handed it over. Lawyer gave the coffin a wide berth and approached the door of the crypt. Fish kept closer than a brother. Lawyer's hand trembled, but the key finally scratched its way into place, and with one turn the padlock unfastened.

"Ketch hold here an' pull her open," whispered Lawyer.

Fish gingerly added his hand to the handle, but as the door swung outward and divulged a yawning pit of blackness he leaped away.

His calves struck the coffin and he fell over backward upon it, rolling to the ground with a weak yawp of terror.

Lawyer hastened to him, principally because he did not care to remain alone on the other side of the black box.

"Git up!" he demanded.

Fish lay still and moaned.

"Git up!" repeated Lawyer, kicking him in the ribs.

Fish gradually attained a standing position. The chattering of his teeth was plainly audible.

"Now light dat candle," whispered Lawyer intensely. Necessity had compelled an improvement in his morale.

Fish fumbled in his pocket and brought forth half a candle, but Lawyer snatched it away from him and lighted it. With a drop of hot wax he attached it to the coffin lid, where it burned without a flicker, and threw a faint circle of light that made the surrounding darkness seem even blacker and more alive.

"Ketch hold dat end," commanded Lawyer, indicating the end nearer the tomb.

"You take dat end."

"What you skeered of?" Lawyer wanted to

know. "You ain't skeered of a box o' likker, is you?"

"How you know dat a box of likker?"

"What you think it is?"

"How you know it ain't turned into somethin' else?"

"Man, you is jes' a plain fool," retorted Mr. Little, not without some uneasiness.

"Ain't you ever hear dat a horsehair in alcohol will turn to a snake?"

"Sho' I is."

"Well, den," concluded Fish.

This argument had some of the enraging finality that characterized many of Fish's gloomy utterances.

"You pick up dis end," said Lawyer. "Don't, I gwine cut yo' th'oat."

He assumed the end nearer the tomb, Fish lifted the other, and they tottered into the vault with the heavy black box carried lengthwise between them. When they lowered it, Lawyer's end slipped and fell about a foot to the ground.

Fish Kelly's coal-black face turned a pale gray.

"I ain't heered nothin' rattle," he said hoarsely.

Lawyer felt cold prickles of terror run over

his body. Neither had he. But business is business.

"Shet yo' mouf, nigger!" he snarled. He took a screwdriver from his hip pocket and proceeded to unscrew one of the ends of the lid.

"Wait," begged Fish. "Lemme git out o' here first!"

But Lawyer grabbed Mr. Kelly as he passed and threw him into the far corner of the African Living and Dead Society's new crypt.

"You stay dar now," he grated, "till I'se ready for you to he'p me tote dis likker back to town. I done had enough o' yo' groanin's an' a-moanin's."

Fish was drawn near by an irresistible fascination as Lawyer pulled out the fourth and final screw. Mr. Little, with an air of nervous bravado, puffed to his feet and dusted off the dirt from the knees of his trousers. The candle on the silent black box had burned till only an inch of it remained above its widening base of tallow. Fish Kelly's eyes and Lawyer's greasy yellow face gleamed in its pale rays; their shadows, huge and grotesque, made sudden crazy leaps upon the curved ceiling just above their shoulders. The tomb was cold and damp. Small movements caused abnormally

loud sounds, as if Echo cried out against the presence of motion in this sanctuary for the forever motionless.

Lawyer picked up the candle.

"Take off dat lid," he commanded.

Fish swallowed, moistened his lips and looked about as if for assistance.

"You take it off," he suggested.

"You want me kick you in de stummick?"

Fish leaned over and slid the coffin top on to the ground.

Then he stood up and looked into the box: gazed upon a still woman in black, with tar-colored skin and closed eyes and frizzy hair in a high pompadour.

"Gawd!" he breathed.

Lawyer leaned over it as if hypnotized. His face had gone pale as amber. His hand holding the candle was trembling so that in the wavering light the recumbent woman's features seemed to change and grimace weirdly.

Lawyer dropped the candle, and in the same instant Fish made a wild dash for the door. But he tripped on the coffin lid and fell prone. Lawyer, in flight, stepped upon him, and Fish grasped the bigger man's leg as a drowning man clutches a straw. In the pitch darkness Lawyer felt two horrid claws fasten upon his

limbs and begin dragging him down in the uttermost abyss of hell. He endeavored to shriek, but emitted only a wordless moan. Kicking fiercely to be free, his other foot found purchase upon Mr. Kelly's face. One forceful push here and he was disengaged. In another instant he was on the outside, running straight into the arms of five men.

"Here one of 'em!" cried Officer Johnson as he clinched with Mr. Little.

"Here's the other one!" cried a white policeman. "Hey, there! Stop!"

The long thin figure of Fish Kelly flitted by like a bird, and gathered speed with each shot from the revolvers of his pursuers. The line of shadows grew fainter and fainter as the chase led up the slope of the hill. In the van was a narrow shadow that darted like a deer over tombstone and hillock; behind, at a constantly widening interval, trailed other shadows, testifying to the hopelessness of their endeavors by occasional volleys fired at random into the air.

"Ne' mind," said Cop Johnson to Mr. Little, whom he held tightly by the scruff of the neck. "I got *you,* anyway!"

Later that night two colored gentlemen sat opposite each other in a small oblong cell, at

one end of which was a heavy iron door with a grating. They had sat for a long time in silence.

"What you smiling at?" inquired Lawyer Little suddenly. "I ain't seen nothin' to be smilin' at."

"I jes' thinkin'," explained Undertaker Williams. "I jes' thinkin' 'bout how when I gits out of here I gwine ketch dat nigger Bohemia. I gwine ketch him all by hisself, an' I sho' gwine bus' him open."

Lawyer Little thought over this for a while, and then he, too, smiled, as if in pleasant anticipation.

## CHAPTER XI

### LAWYER LITTLE EMERGES FOR AIR

LIKE a cork that has been held under water and suddenly released, Fish Kelly—during the period of Lawyer Little's incarceration—bobbed happily up to the surface of life. At first he subsisted upon the store of food that he had purchased during the brief period when he had been in funds. And he lingered day after day in Mr. Greenberg's delicatessen—having thus the opportunity, metaphorically, to touch the hem of the winsome Miss Macedonia Clinton's skirt. He was her willing slave, ran errands for her, lifted the heavy packages to the shelves, swept out the store when it was her day to do this task, kept the show windows clean and shining, and by reason of his simple loyalty and obvious affection won himself, gradually, a place in the lady's regard which he would not have dared to believe.

In order to keep Mr. Greenberg from throwing him incontinently into the street, Fish also

did favors for that somewhat irritable and unappreciative gentleman; and by the time his supply of provisions had run out he had become a useful appendage of the store. But he could not work indefinitely without food, and he had for so long a time been subsisting upon the fruits of adventures concocted by Lawyer Little that he now hardly knew which way to turn.

Macedonia came upon him where he was almost indistinguishable in a dark corner, brooding over the hunger gnawing at his vitals.

"Listen, Fish," she said, reading the story told by his distressful countenance, "if I gits you a job wid Mr. Greenberg, will you promise me sump'n'?"

"Lady," replied Fish, "you don't have to do nothin' for me to make me promise. I'll promise you anything you wants, lady."

Macedonia had difficulty keeping the throb of sudden feeling out of her voice.

"I done already got you de job," she informed him softly. "I wants you to promise me dat when dat man Lawyer Little git out of jail, you won't have nothin' mo' to do wid him. I wants you to keep a job steady, an' not git in no mo' trouble. Will you do dat for me?"

Fish swallowed desperately, but even so, the lump in his throat would not permit him to speak. This unexpected and unusual solicitude overwhelmed him. "Lady," he said presently, "you done heard what I told you." And he got up suddenly and went out into the street where she could not see his eyes.

It was thus that Fish Kelly came into his duty of trundling a delivery wagon about the colored section, delivering groceries for Mr. Greenberg. It was thus, with a great lightening of the heart, that he became respectable, no longer turning with a start when some one touched him on the shoulder. By nature he was never adventurous; peace stole into his heart like a song

It was early in the afternoon—about two months after he had assumed his job—that Fish pushed a cart containing a peck of potatoes along a road in the outskirts of Huntersville. If it is hardly probable that Fish Kelly recognized the directing hand of Fate, it is also hardly probable that Fate recognized Fish Kelly. Instead of the tattered garb that for years had flapped about him like an Arab's tent, he wore a form-fitting black suit, known at the People's Dollar-Down Emporium as a "young man's society model." His usually

unrestrained Adam's apple was hidden by a tall celluloid collar of baby blue, from which descended a four-in-hand of a shrill and joyous red. No longer did his generous feet protrude through mutilated cast-offs to be the play-things of splinters and cold weather. They were encased in buttoned yellow shoes on the tops of which the natural hair of a deceased bullock proclaimed mutely the last word in footwear.

But something like a chill of premonition crept along Mr. Kelly's spine as he passed half a dozen dark-skinned gentlemen who, as guests of the city, were wielding pick and shovel under the superintendence of a white man with a rifle.

They paused in their work on the road and examined him and made slighting remarks born of envy. But Fish was not the kind to answer back. His tar-black features fell into an expression of sullen indifference and he kept his prominent eyes glued to the cart. Thus he got safely by. He trundled along for several yards and began to breathe more freely. Then his heart came into his mouth at the sound of a familiar and dreaded voice.

"Hey, you! You, Fish! You, Fish Kelly!"

It was Lawyer Little. And yet it wasn't

Lawyer Little. His bacon-colored face was thinner. Ninety days of honest manual labor had reduced that one-time spherical form to an almost-human shape. The long, ceremonial coat that once had been black, and later a greenish-black, now chimed in with the pale-green tints of spring, and hung upon him loosely. It might safely have been surmised that he wore it to hide the fact that he wore nothing underneath it. His greasy opera hat, looking dusty and discouraged, sat bottom up in the shelter of a rock, a single reminder of departed splendor.

The expression on Lawyer's face as he leaned on a pick and confronted his former satellite was not such as to reassure that palpitant gentleman. They both remembered that Lawyer had been jailed while Fish, though equally guilty, had escaped.

"Look mighty reckless," commented Lawyer acidly.

Fish squirmed and did not raise his mournful eyes above Lawyer's chest.

"Makin' lot of money, I reckon."

"Mum–mum–mum."

"What's dat?"

Fish pouted his thick lips and blinked his eyes and didn't answer.

Lawyer's bitterness began to crop out. He stepped closer.

"You done forget all about yo' old friends, ain't you? You buys red ties an' yaller shoes an' let yo' friends hump, don't you? What gal you hangin' round?" he asked suddenly.

Fish involuntarily grinned, then pouted, then grinned.

"I ain't hangin' round nothin'," he mumbled.

"Don't lie to me, nigger!"

"Whyn't you go 'way an' leave me 'lone?"

"'Cause you done gone back on a friend. I go to jail and you out struttin' round like a gobbler."

"Wouldn't make you git out no sooner for me to go to jail."

Fish's logic made Lawyer furious.

"Lissen," he hissed. "I gwine git out of here to-day, an' I got have some money."

"I ain't got no money."

"Naw. But you better figger some way to git some."

"I done cut out dis monkey business. I don't want go to jail."

"Well, if you don't want go to jail," said Lawyer with significant emphasis, "you better do like I tell you. Where you work?"

"Mister Greenberg's grocery."

"Meet me at de Palm Palace at eight o'clock."

Without answering, Fish leaned against the handle of the pushcart and proceeded mournfully on his way. The worst had happened. The fact that he always expected the worst did not seem to help him, perhaps because this was beyond the aid of philosophy. The edict given forth by Macedonia was final and unequivocal. The lips that touched bread and water as guest of the turnkey should never touch hers. And now Fish feared he must join Lawyer in some nefarious enterprise, or Lawyer would maneuver to have him jailed for the old offense.

Lawyer's enterprises were almost never successful. It seemed to Fish, as he plodded along the oyster-shell road, that he had the alternative of going to jail with Lawyer in order to keep out of going to jail by himself; or of going to jail by himself in order to keep out of going to jail with Lawyer. In either choice the jail figured largely. The lips of Macedonia began to take on a smile of farewell.

He delivered the peck of potatoes and trundled back to the store. He rested the front end of his cart on the curb, put a brick

in to hold it down, and went into the grocery and sat down in a dark corner on a box of canned tomatoes.

The vivacious, yellow-skinned Miss Clinton espied him suddenly as she came in, and almost dropped the large clay bowl of potato salad she was bearing.

"What's matter wit' chu?" she inquired in a high voice.

Fish pouted darkly.

"You sick?"

His black lids gloomily covered and uncovered the large whites of his eyes.

Miss Clinton placed the bowl of salad inside the glass showcase, wiped her damp hands on her blue-checked apron, and returned to the difficult attack.

"What's matter you can't talk?"

Fish blinked his eyes for some moments and then said:

"I done seen Lawyer Little."

"What you told him?"

"I ain't told him nothin'."

"You better told him somethin'. You know what I told you, ain't you?"

Fish did not reply. Miss Clinton gave a pat to her high-colored glossy coiffure and

stepped firmly away, whereupon Fish sank into a round heap of gloom.

Presently he got up and shuffled to the front of the store where Mr. Moses Greenberg, who believed in novel and striking methods of advertising, was assisted by Miss Clinton in putting some baby mice, kittens and puppies in the shop window.

After casting a shadow of gloom over the whole performance, and getting Mr. Greenberg correspondingly irritated, Fish's eye lightened as it fell upon two heart-shaped, small, near-gold clocks in the notion showcase. They had gold hands with heart-shaped ruby tips. Each of the numerals was printed in gold on a red heart, and a larger red heart decorated the center of the face. They were clocks that spoke eloquently of love.

"How much one dese clocks, Mr. Mose?" Fish inquired, brightening as he pictured how Miss Macedonia would smile to receive one.

Macedonia giggled. "What you want wid one of dem clocks?"

"Gimme dat one, Mr. Mose."

"Where's your money, Fish?"

"You kin take it out my pay."

"Nothing doing," replied Mr. Moses Green-

berg decidedly. "Not till you clean up that eight dollars coming to me."

"When you ain't got no money you needn't come around!" sang a rich baritone, and Ted Harpy pushed his burly frame in front of the showcase, elbowing Fish out of place. His gold tooth fairly scintillated in his round brown grinning face. His sharply pressed mustard-colored suit, his striped silk shirt, and his apple-green cravat fastened with a diamond as large as a pigeon's egg, were aptly calculated to catch the feminine eye.

"'At nigger ain't gwine never buy you nothin'. He jes' talkin'," said he to Miss Clinton, whose white teeth were showing self-consciously at the appearance of competition.

"Who ain't gwine buy her sumpin'? I got money."

"Yeah. You got money like a fish got hair," retorted the driver of Mr. Greenberg's delivery wagon. "You don't know how to take care of no little brown. Whyn't you go 'way an' leave a man's job to a man?"

Fish took in awfully the big thews of Ted Harpy's shoulders, but he would have faced death itself, at any rate conversationally, if Miss Clinton were looking on.

"She gwine git dat clock," he retorted, evad-

ing the personal issue. "You see if she don't."

"Yeah. If I gives it to her," retorted Ted Harpy.

Fish drifted in a dark mood of jealousy out to the street and rolled his cart up the side lane, where he parked it for the night.

Evening was beginning to gather. The dusty windows of the grocery suddenly spouted oblongs of yellow light into the narrow street, crowded with dark-skinned, slowly moving men and women returning from their day's work, talking and laughing happily with not a care for the morrow.

Fish stood moodily on the corner without moving and without thinking for perhaps an hour. Then he drifted across to the Liberty Lunch Room and ordered a huge mess of pork and cabbage. Feeling refreshed, he began to consider whether or not to meet Lawyer at the Palm Palace at eight o'clock. If he did, it would likely mean trouble; but if he didn't, Lawyer might arrange to have him thrown into jail for the part he had played in their venture at bootlegging. Lawyer was very vindictive when he was crossed.

Fish got up and shuffled moodily out into the street, which was alive with a happy, dark-skinned throng. Soprano and baritone laugh-

ter broke now and then loudly forth. In Benny Hooton's barber shop a jet-black gentleman reclined in a chair, a beard of startlingly white lather upon his chin. At the door, three stylish yellow gentlemen, of the younger generation, with straightened greasy hair, pointed their faces skyward and "held" the last note of the "Memphis Blues." Fish crossed the cobbles and dragged his large feet disconsolately toward the Palm Palace. As he reached the fragrant portals of Hammer John's saloon, an emaciated black cat—the hair standing up on its back and on its vertical stiff tail—dashed from beneath the swinging doors and across the sidewalk in front of him.

Fish Kelly abruptly stopped. "If dis here cat gwine cross my trail, den I *know* dere's trouble comin'!" He sallied cautiously out into the street, endeavoring to circle the unlucky animal so that its trail would not cross his. The cat paused, a few feet from the curb, and crouching forward ready for flight, stared at Fish with slitted yellow eyes. One of the creature's ears was torn, and its near shoulder stuck out gauntly through its moth-eaten black fur. A chill crept along Mr. Kelly's spine. He made a sudden dash to pass the sinister creature; but the cat—apparently identifying him

with the original cause of its flight—spat hastily and sprang across the street, where—with feet spraddled angrily and tail stiffly upright—it disappeared in the darkness of a lane.

Despondency sat upon Mr. Kelly like a mantle as he pursued his melancholy way. Eyes on the ground, lips pouted, and his inky face almost lost against the blackness of his clothes, he shuffled through the swinging doors of the Palm Palace. He had been settin' pretty entirely too long, and had known it all the while. Luck was laying for him with a club.

Near the far end of the soda counter, and at the entrance to the pool and billiard room beyond, stood an aged rubber-plant with removable leaves. It was from this that the Palm Palace derived its name. Fish sat down beyond it, where he could view both rooms at once and be invisible to any one coming in the front street door. The three pool tables were all in use, the balls clicking about busily on the level green felt. Spectators sat upon benches in the darker region against the walls, and issued wreaths of tobacco smoke that writhed in graceful layers toward the conical beams of the green-shaded table lights.

In the front room two young bucks and a raucous, boisterous black girl were seated on high stools before the moist marble counter, waited upon by a tall, thin, yellow youth in a coat that had once been white. Upon the mirror behind the "soda jerker's" back were written, with many curlicues of soft soap, the names of the delicacies of the hour, prominent among which were "The Jelly Bean's Delight," "The Razzle Dazzle," and the "Bear Mountain Cocktail." The boisterous black girl already was essaying a glass containing a complicated mixture of chocolate ice cream, banana, sarsaparilla and maraschino cherries. Fish—stirred to momentary interest—began to plan the drink that he should order, when the towering form of Ted Harpy appeared at the front door.

Ted's round brown face shone as if slicked up for society, and Fish Kelly looked upon him with a growing sense of gloom. After all, Ted Harpy was his chief rival for the affections of Miss Macedonia Clinton, and there was much about him to attract the feminine mind. Built like a wrestler or a boxer, he carried off his mustard-colored suit and apple-green cravat with a hearty masculine gusto. His gold tooth vied with the diamond scarf pin to speak the

last word in elegance. Fish did not like to contemplate what romance might occur at Mr. Greenberg's grocery if he himself should be torn away by the hand of the law.

Fish was surprised to observe that Ted, also, seemed to have something on his mind. But he had hardly noticed this when Lawyer Little—wearing this time a shirt and collar, and his gold-rimmed ceremonial spectacles—came through the swinging doors. Lawyer became at once the center of a reception. The two young bucks, the black young lady, crowded round and tactfully asked him where he had been, as if they did not know. Lawyer doffed his battered and greasy opera hat, creased his greenish long-tailed coat in a mannered bow, and explained that he had been down in the country visiting his folks.

Ted Harpy offered him a drink, which he accepted with alacrity. They leaned upon the counter, over their stone mugs of root beer, and fell into a conversation that grew more and more subdued and earnest. Presently they withdrew to one of the circular, cherry-colored tables, with wire legs, by the street window—apparently so as to be able to talk without being overheard.

Fish would have been pleased to see Law-

yer's attention thus diverted from himself if his instinct had not told him that all was not well. Perhaps it was the presence in combination of these two hostile forces. His suspicions grew as he heard Lawyer laugh out suddenly and refer to "dat skinny black nigger." They became unbearable as he saw Ted Harpy strip a silver ring from his finger and push it across the table to Lawyer. If Ted Harpy was paying Lawyer Little to do anything, the chances were that it was not for the benefit of Fish Kelly.

Fish rose from his seat behind the rubber plant and shuffled over to the other table.

"Evenin', Mr. Little."

When Lawyer and Ted saw who it was they simultaneously broke out laughing.

"Set down, Mr. Kelly. Set down," insisted Lawyer, choking back his mirth.

"We was jes' talkin' 'bout you, Mr. Kelly," added Ted, bending over with laughter.

Fish sat down sullenly. At the sight of his pouting lips and resentfully blinking eyes, Lawyer and Ted were besieged by gigglings which they could not control. Lawyer sobered himself and inquired politely:

"Has you ever been arrested, Mr. Kelly?"

This was too much for Ted Harpy. He left

the table and bolted through the swinging doors. They could hear his roars of laughter coming in from the street.

"Dat man crazy, ain't he?" snapped Fish.

Lawyer drew his features into a serious expression.

"Dat business I was gwine have wid you," he said as he pushed back his chair, "we'll talk 'bout dat at the sto' to-morrow mornin'. I got git you to 'scuse me."

He put his hand over his mouth and hurried after Ted Harpy.

A very unpleasant sensation began to fasten itself upon Fish. He had a feeling that something was about to happen. It seemed dangerous to leave the Palace, yet it was perhaps just as dangerous to remain where he was. He sat in an agony of indecision for some while, and then, overcome by a deep depression, he rose and shuffled out in search of that unfailing fountain of cheer, Miss Macedonia Clinton.

He had failed to make his usual evening appointment with her before leaving the store, but hoped nevertheless to find her in. His mood was not lightened to hear from her mother that she had "done gone to the movin' pitchers wid Mister Harpy."

There are some people, like Lawyer Little,

who ride precariously but triumphantly down the current of life like a Canuck balanced on a log. There are others who cling by their finger nails and expect momentarily to go over a waterfall. Fish Kelly was of the latter variety. For years he had been an unwilling passenger with Lawyer, dashing through the rapids of adventure. Of late, while Lawyer was in jail, he had floated into a mirrorlike shoal, calm and beautiful. Here he had plucked and eaten of the lotus of love. He had dreamed dreams. He had imagined Macedonia and himself strolling hand in hand forever through a peaceful meadow where leafy vines bore sliced watermelons, and where flocks of fried chickens would run up and eat the seeds out of your hand. Then Lawyer had returned and drawn him rudely back into the stream.

He shuffled mournfully to his lodgings, turned in and slept dreamlessly till six o'clock the next morning. He rose and partook of a light breakfast at the Liberty Lunch Room and then repaired to the grocery.

Ted Harpy soon drove up with the horse and wagon, whistling cheerily as though he had spent a pleasant time the evening before. Under the direction of Mr. Greenberg, Fish

loaded his cart with orders for the early delivery, and presently trundled off on his rounds.

As he returned with the empty wagon about an hour later, he was not exactly cheered to see Lawyer Little standing in front of the grocery as if waiting for him. He dropped the front of the cart on the curb and put the brick in it to hold it down. Then he walked hastily into the store entrance as if he had not seen Lawyer.

"Hey dere! You, Fish!"

Fish paused. He did not care to converse with Lawyer, but there seemed no escape. Far in the rear of the store Mr. Greenberg and the plump and rounded Miss Clinton were waiting on a group of customers. Ted Harpy lounged by the notions showcase.

"What you want?" asked Fish soberly, as Lawyer approached.

"I got some money for you."

"How come?"

"I ain't got it. But dere's a tall yaller man down on de next corner say he bringin' you some money from yo' folks. I been waitin' here to tell you."

"How come he ain't come up here where I is?"

"Don't talk back to me, nigger!" threatened Lawyer. "You go down dere like I tells you."

Fish was easily dominated. He shuffled down to the corner, hoping with the darky's credulity that a fortune was awaiting him.

There was no tall yellow man on the next corner. Fish looked all around and into one or two stores. He next looked separately for a tall man and then for a yellow man. He saw neither. Lawyer had fooled him. He shuffled gloomily back to the store.

As he approached he was astonished to see Mr. Greenberg, waving his hands, rush excitedly into the street, followed by Ted Harpy and Lawyer and Macedonia and several customers. When they saw Fish they pointed and rushed in his direction.

Fish stopped and looked over his shoulder. For a moment it occurred to him that they had espied the tall yellow man behind him. But he was disillusioned when Mr. Greenberg, trembling with excitement, grabbed him fiercely by the arm.

"Here he is! Here's the scoundrel! Call a policeman! Call a policeman!"

But a passing policeman had observed the rumpus. He crossed the street and shouldered his way into the center of the crowd.

"What's the trouble here?" he inquired, taking a grip on Fish's collar.

"He's a thief! A thief! He steals my two clocks, wort' thirty-six dollar. Oy yoi! Hold him. Hold him!"

"Where's them clocks?" demanded the officer, giving Fish a shake.

"I ain't seen no clocks."

"Yes, you have. These men saw you." Mr. Greenberg indicated Lawyer and Ted.

"All right," said the officer. "You'd better come down to the station with me and prefer charges. It's early and we can get him on to-day's docket. You two men come, too."

"Ain't no need for me to go down dere," objected Lawyer, at the same time involuntarily putting his hand to the pocket in the tail of his greenish coat. "I done tol' all I know."

"Me neither," agreed Ted, who had also become decidedly nervous at the apparently unexpected idea of having to go to court. "All I done is seen him take de clocks an' run."

"Shut up and come on!" snapped the policeman.

Lawyer and Ted shut. They also followed along. Mr. Greenberg rushed back and locked the grocery and then joined them. Miss Clinton was there. So were the customers. Small

boys sprang up in myriads, as if out of the pavement, and formed an awe-struck convoy. The procession grew larger and larger, and by the time they had traversed the eight blocks to the station house it resembled a small parade.

## CHAPTER XII

### RING OUT, WILD BELLS!

THINGS had happened so fast, Fish wasn't quite sure whether he had stolen anything or not. He remembered the clocks very well. One of them he had tried to purchase the day before—and no doubt this would count against him. From Mr. Greenberg's excitement, and the size of the crowd, he felt that his crime had been terrible. It remained but for the court to do the rest.

Fish's skin was almost a battleship gray, and his eyes stuck out like a crab's. In the police station he stood in a daze during the formalities of entering the charge against him. The next thing he knew, an officer had led him along the street into another building and he was being urged down unpleasant corridors, through strange apartments, and up a flight of steps. He expected to land in a grated cell and was correspondingly astonished when he came suddenly out into a crowded room and

saw Macedonia sitting on a bench facing him, not thirty feet away.

It was the court room, and he was in the prisoner's pen. He sat down on the long bench that held perhaps a dozen white and colored nondescripts. A solid wooden partition, about three feet high, separated him from the side of the judge's desk, which faced the room from an elevated platform. In front of this platform was a space and three rows of empty chairs. Then came another railing, and, behind that, well-filled benches for spectators and witnesses took up the balance of the long room.

On one of these front benches sat Mr. Greenberg, Lawyer, Ted Harpy and Macedonia. None of them was very much at ease. Macedonia sat rigid with her chin elevated and her lips compressed. She kept her eyes fastened on the golden eagle perched above the red curtains draped on the wall behind the judge's chair.

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!"

The sharp voice of the clerk rang out through the room, although the remainder of his announcement was lost in the noise of the crowd scuffling its feet.

The judge, a youngish, patient-looking man

with thin black hair, had come in and was standing by his seat till the announcement should be over.

"The honorable court is now in session. Be seated," finished the clerk.

Every one sat down, including the judge.

Then the clerk at breakneck speed called off a list of names, saying each name three times. After that the occupants of the prisoners' pen were ushered before the judge, one at a time. A policeman would testify, and sometimes a witness. Most were charged with being "then and there drunk and intoxicated," and were swiftly fined ten dollars. One man was given ninety days for stealing, and Fish shuddered.

At last Fish heard his own name and stumbled through the partition gate and shuffled uneasily before the judge. The clerk read the charge that Fish Kelly was accused of stealing two clocks from the showcase of Mr. Greenberg.

When the clerk administered the oath, Fish, instead of holding up his right hand, held both hands above his head in a "Kamerad" attitude. The court room tittered.

Ted Harpy and Lawyer Little then were summoned also into the space between the railing and the judge. Miss Clinton followed

them. They were sworn and then Ted Harpy was pushed into the witness box at the corner of the judge's desk.

"What do you know about this man's taking any clocks?" demanded the judge.

"I jes' seen him, jedge," answered Ted nervously. His circular brown face shone with sweat. "I jes' seen him take 'em an' run."

"Do you work in the store?"

"Yas, suh."

"Why didn't you try to stop him?"

"He too quick for me, jedge. I try to stop him, but he too quick for me. He run down de corner an' hide 'em somewhere. Den he comes back an' I tells de boss man on him."

"You say he ran down the street with the two clocks?"

"Yas, suh."

"Didn't anybody else see him? Didn't some one on the street try to stop him?"

"Yas, suh. Dey seen him. Naw, suh, didn't nobody see him. I don't know who seen him. Mister Little, he seen him."

Ted wiped his glistening forehead with the back of his hand.

The judge didn't seem to be favorably impressed by Ted's manner of testimony.

"Step up here," he said to Lawyer.

Mr. Little, who carried his silk hat in his hand and had donned his gold-rimmed spectacles, stepped into the box and smiled suavely at the judge and bowed ingratiatingly.

"Yo' honor," he announced sonorously, "it pains me werry much to have to testify to dis effeck, yo' honor. Dis po' misguided youth what has fell into de clutches of de law am a frien' of mine. An' a frien' of mine, yo' honor, is a frien' of mine. But, yo' honor, as you knows an' I knows, de law is de law."

"It seems to me that I've seen you before," interrupted his honor.

"Yas, suh," agreed Lawyer. "I has had de pleasure an' de distinction, suh." He waved his hand as if to dismiss the subject. "Now dis young man, Fish Kelly."

"I remember now," persisted the court. "You got jailed for bootlegging. Brought the liquor in in a coffin."

"Dat was how dey accused me, yo' honor."

"You were not guilty?"

"Naw, suh."

"You were a perfectly innocent man and were sentenced to jail for ninety days?"

"Yas, suh."

"Very well," commented the court dryly, "proceed."

A good deal of the wind had been taken out of Lawyer's sails.

"I seen dis skinny black nigger swipe dem clocks," he finished lamely. "Den he run, an' I told de boss man."

"Why did you tell the boss man on a friend of yours?" inquired the court, who was expert in treading the devious paths to truth locked in the African mind.

"Well, yo' honor." Lawyer was somewhat nonplussed. "'Cause he done stole it dishonestly."

"Naw, you didn't!" It was Macedonia's sharp voice, speaking out a woman's instinct of protection and ignoring formal court procedure. "I knows how come you told on him."

The judge motioned for Macedonia to take Lawyer's place in the box.

"What's all this?" he inquired.

"Dat Lawyer Little," explained Macedonia with excited determination, "he told Mr. Kelly 'at if he didn't fix a way for him to git some money he gwine git him put in jail. Fish he told him he ain't gwine do nothin' like that. Dat's how come dat Lawyer Little tol' on him."

The judge stroked his chin.

"You claim that Little told on Kelly out of spite?"

"Yas, suh. Dat's what he done, too. I knows dat big nigger."

"Then you believe also that Kelly took the clocks?"

"Naw, suh. I don't believe he took no clocks."

"But if Lawyer Little informed on Fish Kelly out of spite it follows, doesn't it, that Kelly took the clocks? The clocks are gone, aren't they?"

"I don't know nothin' 'bout dat. Fish Kelly ain't stole no clocks. I seen dem clocks after he went out in the mornin'."

"You noticed that the clocks were in the store after he had left it?"

"Yas, suh. After he lef' in de mornin'. An' he didn't come back in no mo'. Next thing I heered was Mr. Greenberg runnin' out after him."

The judge rubbed his chin. "How is it that you would happen to notice that these clocks were there? You were pretty busy with other things, weren't you?"

"Yas, suh. But Mr. Greenberg he took dem clocks out of de show case an' set 'em so they

alarms would go off at ten o'clock, an' I was watchin' for de alarms to go off."

"Oh, I see," said the judge. "But what reason would this other man, Ted Harpy, have for saying that Kelly took the clocks if he didn't?"

Macedonia hung her head. What woman can speak out and condemn a man for loving her? But there was only a short pause.

"'Cause dat nigger love my gal!"

Fish Kelly had spoken loudly and unexpectedly. He himself was surprised and alarmed at the loudness of his own voice. But the spectacle of Macedonia talking in his defense had stirred him to the depths.

"Do you mean that Ted Harpy is a rival of yours for this lady's hand?" inquired the judge.

"Yas, suh. Dat's what he is."

"Yo' honor," announced Lawyer Little, swinging his silk hat in an oratorical gesture, "I rises to a question of personal privilege!"

The court, suppressing a smile, allowed him to proceed. Lawyer was quick to see his honor's amusement and to take advantage of it.

"Yo' honor." Lawyer stepped away from Ted Harpy so as to have space for dramatic effect. On his fat, bacon-colored face was an

expression of surprise and pain. "Dis lady have casted dispersions on my integrity." Lawyer indicated Macedonia with a flourish of his battered high hat, at the same time that he reached out to the judge a yellow palm, as if in supplication for the simplest justice.

"She have calumnified me," he went on in a voice vibrant with emotion. With his silk hat raised to a commanding angle, his gold-rimmed spectacles gleaming, and his rotund form clothed in the ancient, greenish, long-tailed coat, Lawyer was an arresting figure. "She have calumnified me," he repeated, with a hurt tremolo in his voice, "without no justification circumstances."

Lawyer looked deliberately about the court room, the corners of his mouth drawn down, as if expecting every one present to rise up and shout with indignation at the way he was being treated. Fish, in the prisoner's pen, trembled. "Now I done erritated a lion!" he muttered to himself. The court room, he remembered, was where Lawyer claimed to be always triumphant.

Lawyer swung his arms. "A man's character, yo' honor, is his onliest possession." He was now off upon one of his characteristic speeches, full of long words. Such harangues

would sometimes amuse the white folks and so carry him through difficult situations. "I comes to yo' cote to shake de han' of de law in friendship. I comes to de cote a honest man, to bring a bad man to justice. An' den what happens?"

Lawyer paused with his arm raised and his mouth open. In his immediate neighborhood a slightly muffled silver bell shrilled forth with startling insistence. The ringing suddenly ceased. The court room held its breath.

"Yo' honor," stammered Lawyer. The hand holding the opera hat was trembling. "I—feels sick. If you will 'scuse me, I thinks I'll go outside an'. . . ."

The court looked puzzled but interested. "What was that ringing I heard just now?" he demanded of the eloquent Mr. Little.

"Ringing?" inquired Lawyer, raising his eyebrows. "I ain't heerd no ringin, yo' honor." As he protested, Mr. Little was surreptitiously working a hand toward the tail of his coat.

"Oh, you haven't?" said the judge.

"Naw, suh. Not me. I ain't. . . ."

The bell suddenly shrilled forth again, and Lawyer was so startled that the hat dropped from his trembling hand. He clutched at the

tail of his coat. His grasp served to muffle the sound, but the bell continued to ring for a few moments longer. Then it stopped as before.

Lawyer's mouth was open as if for breath, and perspiration glistened on his distorted, bacon-colored face. A titter ran through the court room. It rose to a roar as the eyes of every one turned to Ted Harpy. He was facing the judge, and with his right hand behind him—plainly visible to the room full of spectators—was wiggling in a convulsive effort to remove something from his hip pocket. It came into view as a small goldish clock, and just then its unmuffled bell rang forth with a piercing shrillness. Ted Harpy jumped as though stung by a wasp.

The court room rocked with a tumult of laughter.

The judge, his face red with suppressed hilarity, pounded on the desk for order.

"Arrest those two men!" he shouted. His voice could hardly be heard above the gale of laughter.

"You!" he cried, pointing at Fish, "you are dismissed."

White teeth shining in his black face, Fish shuffled down the aisle past the rows of laugh-

ing spectators. To his slow-moving mind the situation gradually cleared. This was the plot that Ted and Lawyer had prepared the night before. Their own net had caught them.

Out in the corridor his heart was warmed as Macedonia hurried up and slipped her hand in his arm. Together they went along the hall and down the stairs and out into the yellow sunlight of the street. Here they paused for a moment, grinning with nervous relief, to look at each other. Macedonia, in brown skirt and white shirtwaist, seemed to Fish like a lovely flower. Her soft eyes met his frankly.

Their attention was attracted to four men who walked abreast down the stone courthouse steps. The two outer men wore blue uniforms with metal buttons and shiny badges. Their fingers skillfully were entwined into the coat-sleeve cuffs of the two men in the middle. Of these the stout, bacon-colored one wore a pale-green frock coat and a greasy and dented opera hat. The tall, muscular one was garbed in a stylish, mustard-colored suit, set off by an apple-green tie in which was thrust a gleaming diamond pin. The expression upon his brown, circular face was decidedly hangdog and sheepish.

And then—as the policemen and the two

prisoners approached Fish and Macedonia—an unprecedented thing occurred. Miss Macedonia Clinton raised her plump arms and joined her hands behind Mr. Kelly's high blue celluloid collar. She drew his head down. Before the stout gentleman and the muscular gentleman, before the two men in blue uniforms, in fact before the whole world, Miss Clinton planted a kiss of love upon Mr. Fish Kelly's face.

It may be doubted whether the soul of man has ever attained a higher elevation of pure joy than Fish experienced at that moment. His ebony face, turned upon Lawyer and Ted, displayed a double row of brilliant white teeth. But the effect upon the prisoners was quite otherwise. Lawyer Little's bacon-colored countenance was a study of bafflement and rage. It foretold no good, should the opportunity ever arise when he should be able to revenge himself on Fish Kelly. But Fish, for once in his life, was indifferent to the spectacle of Lawyer's wrath. He stood up straight and swelled his skinny chest. His protruding eyes sought Ted Harpy's, so as to convey to his rival the full meaning of this scene of triumph. But Ted Harpy bowed his round brown face, and kept his eyes on the ground; nor did he lift

his head while traversing the street and entering the portals of the red brick jail.

When the two conspirators and their guardians had disappeared, Fish and Macedonia looked once more at each other. Then, hand in hand, they turned their faces homeward. They avoided the unsavory district that seems —by some mysterious affinity—always to cluster near police stations, and wandered to the left toward Monticello Avenue. Up this thoroughfare they proceeded, oblivious of the smiles and understanding glances vouchsafed them by passersby. Large green electric cars, bound for Virginia Beach, rolled dustily past, and the passengers looked from the windows at the tall, thin, colored man, his countenance blacker than his clothes, and the trim, light-brown, colored woman, with high-coiled glossy hair, wandering hand in hand, their dark eyes shining in a sort of beatific ecstasy, up the busy street.

"Uh-*hmm!!* Got de fever!" was the first remark that reached them, and they dropped hands self-consciously to see old Preacher Jackson, in brown trousers and a red flannel undershirt, grinning toothlessly at them from an open doorway. "Reckon you chilluns gwine be comin' see me soon!" the old darkey

opined, and both Fish and Macedonia beamed back at him with agreeing grins.

"Honey," said Fish, stirred to the heights of daring by this event, "when is us gwine git married?"

"We'll talk it over with poppa," she answered, accepting Fish in principle. But the thought of talking over such an intimate, and possibly controversial subject with the burly Mr. Clinton struck Fish like an icy wind.

"What he got to do wid it?" he inquired as they turned into Queen Street. "I ain't marryin' him."

"He my poppa, Fish. I wants him to think I wouldn't marry nobody without he was willin'."

"S'pose he say no?"

"You come up to de house to-night to supper," Macedonia replied, evasively, as they entered Mr. Greenberg's delicatessen.

## CHAPTER XIII

### TED HARPY AGAIN

FISH worked the remainder of that day with only half a heart, for every minute brought nearer the time when he must confront Macedonia's family. He was familiar with the gray hair and severe spectacles of his loved one's mother, and her father's social and business altitude were known to the entire town. The thought of entrusting himself to the critical eyes of both of them for an entire evening caused a queer feeling at the pit of his stomach.

But love is stronger than fear. Fish paused at the pump in the back yard of his dwelling that evening and scrubbed his countenance till it shone like burnished ebony. Then he ascended to the second floor and brushed his "society model" black suit until his room was full of lint. He next breathed heavily upon the dullness of his baby-blue celluloid collar, and polished it on his shirt sleeve until it was a fitting companion for the shrill crimson four-

in-hand tie. He anointed his shoes with bacon-fat filched from Mr. Greenberg, and started out for the Clinton's residence with a heart full of misgivings.

Up Queen Street, through the throng of colored men and women returning from work, Fish pursued his melancholy way. Then out Church Street, with its motley of pawnshops, and boarding houses run by "po' white trash"; past the little clothing stores conducted by Jewish gentlemen: windows crammed with shirts and socks and ties of gaudy hue, and over each doorway a flaming red placard announcing a "closing out sale." On by the corner saloons, frequented sometimes by foreign "po' white trash" and negroes alike; and at last emerging into the more agreeable atmosphere of the Huntersville negro section.

Here the paved streets changed into unpaved roads with sidewalks of cinders and sagging boards. Little black and tan children with big eyes and dirty too-large clothing waddled in bow-legged contentment from one doorstep to another. The houses were weather-beaten and long since forgetful of paint; window glasses, once broken, were replaced with newspaper, or not replaced at all. Porches, with hand-made rickety railings, leaned at various

angles to meet their two or three worm-eaten wooden steps. Mangy sore-eyed dogs, in the same state of apparent disrepair as their dwellings, scratched itching ears on the sidewalk. An occasional goat, grayish with dirt, browsed upon the wayside grass. But the atmosphere, though dilapidated, was to Fish full of charm. Here was the warm-hearted contentment, the easy-going laughter, the love of kin and kind, that distinguished his dark-skinned race. He pushed on with more cheerfulness toward the goal of the evening.

Too soon it came into view. Just beyond the more populous squares of Huntersville, several of the financially successful colored people had erected their own homes. Here ground was cheap, and each dwelling was surrounded by a generous plot of lawn. Whitewashed picket fences protected front flower gardens and decorative crèpe myrtle trees. Brick walks, bordered by whitewashed stones and sea shells, led from front gates to ample wistaria-covered porches. Shades were respectably drawn before the long windows, but not too low to shut off the view of an occasional piano or phonograph. Fish's heart began to sink at the unpleasant contrast between his own poverty and all of this wealth. His

resolution almost failed him as he turned a corner and the lighted windows of Mr. Clinton's white clapboard dwelling loomed upon his view.

In front of Mr. Clinton's house ran a granolithic sidewalk, which had been paid for by Mr. Clinton himself, and across this sidewalk slanted a concrete driveway, leading up to the small white garage in the rear. The side of the residence itself had long French windows facing upon the brick floor of a porch that ran the depth of the house, its roof supported by three strong white columns. In front of the house was a clipped green lawn, divided by a brick path that led up to the two stone steps of the small front porch, and the shining brass knocker on the white front door. Fish stood on the sidewalk in front of the house, gazed at its freshly painted green shutters and expensive slate roof, and felt his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth, and a fine perspiration break out under his hat. Love was one thing, Mr. Clinton was another. "Feet, us sho' don't crave to amble up dat slick brick path. Feet, better take us home!"

Feet were just about to do as directed when the white front door flew open and Macedonia appeared.

"You Fish! I been watchin' for you."

Fish was somewhat heartened by her presence, but he shuffled up the wide brick walk with a heart full of misgivings. And when he reached the door, he found that his misgivings were justified. Macedonia was red-eyed and nervous. She evaded his inquiring look and led him to the dining room where, at either end of an oblong linen-covered table, sat Mr. and Mrs. Clinton. It did not encourage Fish to observe that he was late.

Mrs. Clinton, upon his entrance, went forth to procure for him a plate of ham and eggs, but Mr. Clinton kept his eye upon the pursuit of a piece of egg with a flexible steel knife and gave no sign of having knowledge of Fish's presence, save when Macedonia introduced him, to emit a sort of grunt.

Such a greeting might have spoiled the appetite of even a more resolute man than Fish. But Fish had an appetite that was practically above being spoiled, and he ate with a gusto that lifted him immensely in Macedonia's eyes, although Mr. Clinton's expression seemed to grow more and more ominous.

Finally, when Fish acquiesced in the suggestion of a third helping, Mr. Clinton raised his head and banged upon the table with his palm.

"Young man," he cried, and his voice was more powerful even than Lawyer Little's, "do I understand that you have the desire to marry my daughter?"

Fish gave a startled glance at the square belligerent face of light yellow, the cropped mustache, and the terrifying glare that sped through a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. Mr. Clinton's burly frame seemed as if about to rise suddenly and overwhelm his guest. Fish retired into the safety of silence. He kept his gaze glued to the table, slowly opened and closed his prominent eyes, and pouted his lips far enough to indicate resentment, but not so far as to signal defiance.

"Is you deaf?" thundered the man he craved for a father-in-law.

"Naw, I ain't deef," Fish retorted, looking out of the side of his eyes.

"Den why don't you answer my question?"

Fish pouted his lips and blinked defiantly, relapsing into the silence that infuriated the talkative Mr. Clinton.

"Poppa!" cried Macedonia, seeing the danger signs.

"What did dis nigger ever do?" roared the lawyer in reply, relinquishing restraint. "Push a wagon! I gives you de bes' education money

can buy, I raises you like white folks, an' den you wants to marry a snipe out of de gutter! Ain't you go no respect for your raisin's?"

"Jes' as good as you is," Fish muttered.

"Poppa!" interjected Macedonia—but to no avail.

"You git out of my house!" yelled the angry parent.

Fish deemed it wisest to obey. He shambled out to the hall, where he put on his flapping black hat in intentional defiance of the conventions of this conventional home. He paused then, with the thought of speaking again to Macedonia. But at that moment Macedonia came backward through the dining room door, her hands pushed placatingly against the distinguished chest of the burly Mr. Clinton. Fish momentarily met the glare of paternal passion that shone through Mr. Clinton's spectacles. Then he thought it best to take to the open air.

"Had I stayed, I'd a-kilt him!" he murmured encouragingly to himself. But Clinton was a tower of strength in the colored community; few men would dare to cross him. He appeared an insuperable obstacle in the way of Fish Kelly's happiness, and it was with

troubled dreams that Fish, at last in his room, drifted off to sleep.

But the next morning Mr. Kelly's spirits rose like the lark.

"Fish," said Macedonia when Mr. Greenberg was in another part of the store, "dey is a nice room at No. 11 Queen Street. You go an' rents it. We gwine git married; an' after poppa know we gwine do it anyhow, he'll swing roun' our way an' kill anbody dat says anything ag'inst us. I done seen my poppa act before."

Fish's teeth and eyes gleamed in his tar-black face. "When us gwine git married?"

"Soon as things cools down a little. Soon as I git me some clothes."

Thoughts of delay aroused misgivings in Fish's breast. "Promise me we gits married befo' dat Lawyer Little an' dat Ted Harpy gits out of jail!"

Macedonia smiled and walked away. If her lover feared the handsome Ted as a rival, it was not for the woman to remove that fear. But she realized as well as he the advisability of having the nuptials ere Lawyer Little—who frowned upon matrimony for his vassal—should emerge from durance vile. She realized this, but she was anxious, too, not to alienate

her father; so she continued to work upon the recalcitrant Mr. Clinton, and four weeks had slipped by before at last she named the day.

Fish had not neglected to prepared himself for this expected occasion. That morning he strolled out of No. 11 and into the sunshine of Queen Street. In all his glory, Fish easily outshone Solomon in all of his. He shuffled alertly downtown-ward. His black "young man's society model" waist-seam suit was still warm from the presser's iron. His yellow shoes with tops of brown-and-white hair seemed to throw off sparks. The high baby-blue celluloid collar joined with the crimson necktie in an almost audible harmony. But outshining them all was the self-conscious grin that wrinkled his ebony face into a frame for his prominent white teeth.

"Look at dat nigger," remarked Benny Hooton admiringly, from his vantage point at the door of his barber shop across the street. "He jes' pickin' 'em up an' layin' 'em down!"

Fish turned out of Queen Street into Monticello Avenue and came upon Preacher Jackson, who in the ease of a red undershirt and gray trousers upheld by galluses, was smoking a bronchially afflicted cob pipe on his doorstep, while watching his idolized Only Boy

play in the grass that sprang through the cobbles of the gutter.

Preacher Jackson chuckled through his toothless gums.

"Anybody look at you," he said to Fish, "think you own a farm an' 'leben horses."

Fish stopped and lifted his black felt hat from his blacker head and scratched the undulations of his narrow cranium.

"I gwine down git dat license," he grinned.

"I don't want hear 'bout whar you gwine," said Preacher. "I want hear 'bout whar you ain't gwine."

"What you mean—whar I ain't gwine?"

"You know Lawyer Little and Ted Harpy is out?"

Fish stood suddenly upright. The radiance of his countenance suffered an eclipse.

"When dey git out?"

"Yestiddy."

Preacher sucked a death rattle out of his pipe.

"An' I want tell you dis, Fish Kelly. You been a good nigger since you kep' clear of dat yaller rascal, Lawyer Little. You been workin' steady an' keepin' out of jail. An' you got you a good gal."

Fish swallowed his prominent Adam's apple

and weakly cleared his throat. The mere thought of Lawyer Little had the effect upon him of a cat upon a bird.

"I hopes," he began, and then was suffocated by the awful idea, "I hopes dey don't git to thinkin' 'bout my weddin'."

"Huh! Who care what dey think? Jes' you min' yo' business an' leave 'em be. You go on down an' git dat license, an' be standin' in the church when yo' pretty li'l' yaller fever come marchin' up de aisle. I gwine marry you-all so tight in dat church can't nothin' down lower dan de Golden Streets bus' you loose."

Fish was heartened, for Preacher Jackson was a doughty supporter. In his youth he had been a "bad nigger," until he killed a man over a game of craps. Legend had it that the man had won from Preacher on throw after throw of a pair of red dice, and had irritated Preacher beyond restraint by the constant repetition of "Read 'em and weep." Every time the man rolled those red dice they came up either seven or eleven, and there was nothing Preacher could do except read them and weep. So finally he produced a .45 in order to vindicate his insulted manhood, the

red dice roller produced a .38, and Preacher fired first.

By some chance, that the prison officials have never been able to understand, Preacher "got religion" in the penitentiary, and since his release his influence and example had weaned many a young man from the lure of craps and gin.

"How you git dat license? Jes' ast him for it?"

"Jes' gib him two dollars an' write what he tell you."

"I can't write to-day," objected Fish, who never could write, or read, either. "I done hurt my han'."

"He do de writin' for you. You got de ring?"

"What ring?"

"Weddin' ring, nigger! 'Weddin' ring!"

"Do dat come wid de license?"

"You's de know-nothingest nigger I ever did see. Ain't you never been married befo'?" Preacher had lost four wives to death and three to other men and couldn't understand such profound ignorance.

Fish grinned and pouted and shuffled his generous feet.

"I seen some rings in Mr. Greenberg's

store," he suggested presently. "Cost a dollar an' a half."

"Git one of dem, den. An' be at dat church at seben. 'Cause if you ain't dere I gwine marry her my own self."

Fish chuckled convulsively at this humorous idea.

"You Only!" cried Preacher to the single offspring of his many marriages. "You come back here!" The idolized infant was crawling toward the smoother pavement of York Street. Preacher got up, hobbled to the corner, and rescued the little black beetle just as a large army truck with muffler cut-out thundered past.

"Now you set whar you dern is," he commanded as he deposited Only again in the cobbled gutter. "Don't, I'se gwine pick up somethin' an' bus' you open." He turned back to Fish. "Now, you keep clear of dat Lawyer Little an' dat Ted Harpy. I don't trus' Lawyer Little, 'cause I know him, an' I don't trus' Ted Harpy, 'cause I don't know him."

Some of the bloom gone from his assurance, Fish shuffled in the direction of the courthouse. So many possible disasters, flowing from the release of Ted and Lawyer, swarmed to his mind as he walked, that he resembled a

charcoal sketch of Despondency when he finally sidled dubiously up to the desk of the license clerk.

"Boss, I want git a license."

"You look like you want a license to get hung. What's the matter, is she bigger than you are?"

"Naw, suh."

"What are you so gloomy about?" inquired the clerk.

"Lawyer Little an' Ted Harpy out of jail. Dey gwine make trouble."

"The trouble with you, Fish," said the clerk as he began making out the license, "is that you let Lawyer influence you too much. What's the name of your lady, now?"

"Miss Macedonia Clinton."

"Macedonia Clinton and Fish Kelly," repeated the clerk. "Here you are Fish. Two dollars. Now you take my advice. When you see Lawyer Little, you tell him to mind his own business. You are just as good a man as he is."

Thus heartened, when he left the courthouse Fish once more was picking 'em up and laying 'em down. It was in the mood of a conqueror that he entered Mr. Greenberg's store of notions and delicatessen.

"What you want?" smiled the trim Miss Macedonia.

"You ain't forgot dat begagement you got wid me dis evenin', is you?"

"Go on, man!" giggled Macedonia. "Whar *you* gwine be at seben o'clock dis evenin'?"

"Can't tell," responded Fish, showing thirty-two white teeth, "most anything mout happen 'fo' den."

"Huh!" retorted Macedonia in scorn. "You better be dar. Folks tell me Ted Harpy in town lookin' for me."

Fish's brow clouded at this pleasantry.

"I wanna buy me a ring," he said sullenly.

"What kind o' ring?" inquired Macedonia, opening the case.

"Weddin' ring, woman! Weddin' ring! What you 'spect?"

"I jes' loves dis one," said Macedonia, producing a narrow near-gold band on which perched a heart-shaped ruby the size of a thumb-nail.

"Gimme dat, den."

Fish poured a dollar and fifty cents into the coffers of Mr. Greenberg, received the ring in return, and sallied forth again. He wandered languidly up Granby Street to York and down

York until he was opposite the ramshackle corner where Preacher Jackson resided.

"Fire!" Fish heard some one say near him.

From far down the street came the clamor of a bell. All faces turned, like dark sunflowers, toward the four galloping horses and the gleaming engine that were steadily coming nearer.

Two beautiful grays were the leaders. Almost white in the sunlight, delicate nostrils distended, eyes wide, mouths drawn back by the taut reins, they surged onward in a magnificently rhythmical gallop. They were scarce half a block away in the narrow asphalted street when Fish suddenly became frozen with horror.

Along the cobbled gutter of the intersecting street on all fours scrambled a small, black creature like a mammoth beetle. Within forty seconds its course would carry it beneath the feet of the imminent horses.

"You Only!" Fish tried to shout. But Only Boy continued in his hasty scrambling, urged on by the ambition to reach the smooth asphalt before his father once more retrieved him. He came out beyond the curb, attained the asphalt, and crawled directly toward the clattering iron hoofs not a hundred feet away. It was impos-

sible to swerve the horses in the narrow street or to stop the hurtling of the heavy engine. The driver threw on his brake with an oath and a prayer.

Then a miracle. A long, black shape appeared against the white breast of the near horse, and swooped the beetle from the pavement; it was struck by the shoulder of the near horse, whirled completely around three times, but kept its feet and landed safely against a lamp-post. Then everybody saw it was Fish Kelly and that Only was unharmed in his arms.

Preacher Jackson pressed through the crowd that had gathered on the instant, and fiercely seized the black infant.

"You Only! Is you hurt? Praise de good Lawd! Oh, Lordy! Praise de good Gawd. My chile he ain't hurt de littlest mite. My li'l' baby he jes' scared plum' to def'!"

A strange white man came up to Fish and shook his hand. A portly colored lady, who when last they had met had attempted to extinguish Fish with a pan of scalding water, now put her arms about him and kissed him on his tilted felt hat. He heard some one say:

"Dat smoke sho' is a hero."

Feeling confused and embarrassed, his head

still spinning, Fish wormed his way free of the crowd and shambled off down the street alone. But he had not gone many blocks before he began to appreciate to its full the splendor of his act. He started once more picking 'em up and laying 'em down. And as he walked he would occasionally put out a black hand in a gesture of disdain and say:

"Brush by, Lawyer Little! Brush by. You's talkin' to a hero now!"

So completely was he enveloped in a roseate haze that it was with an astounding jolt that he heard a familiar voice:

"Hey dar! You Fish! You Fish Kelly!"

It was Lawyer Little. A shade paler, perhaps; a trifle careworn as the consequence of ninety days in durance; but the same sphericity of bacon-colored face and dumpy body, the same long-tailed coat, once black, now a misty green; and on the rear of his shaven head sat, at a carefree angle, the same dusty and greasy opera hat. He advanced and slapped Fish on the back.

"Hello, dar, you skinny black rascal. We been jes' lookin' for you." He pushed Fish in the direction of a group of darkies gathered in a circle in the rear of the vacant corner lot. "We got a li'l' game on."

Fish nervously swallowed his prominent Adam's apple while the blackest forebodings arose within him. When in the hands of Lawyer Little he was as helpless as in the hands of Fate.

"I—I ain't got no time to fool," Fish hedged. "I gotta git married."

"When you gwine git married?"

"Seben o'clock."

"You got lots o' time, nigger; you got lots of time," said Lawyer, hustling Fish along. "Who you gwine marry?"

"You know who I gwine marry," replied Fish, batting his eyes belligerently.

"Here another man wants git his hands burned!" cried Lawyer victoriously. To get Fish into a crap game just prior to his wedding was an idea sweet to Lawyer's mind, for he regarded Fish's yearnings toward marriage and respectability as a personal betrayal.

The circle of colored youths and men made way, and it then became evident why Lawyer had been on the lookout for new recruits. One knee on the ground, Ted Harpy, his huge yellow shoulders gleaming through a tattered blue shirt, shook a pair of ivory dice in his big hand and pleaded with some one to "fade" him.

A pile of bills and silver before him showed in what good luck he had been playing.

"Dis man'll fade you!" Lawyer returned. "Dis skinny man can make dem bones say: 'Poppa, I'se yo' chile!' "

Ted Harpy elaborately counted out four one-dollar bills.

"Who gwine fade me?" he asked, and rolled the dice.

"Crap!" cried the crowd, and laughed, because the dice showed two and one, and Ted would have lost.

This was too much for Fish. He took four dollars from the thin sheaf in his pocket and laid them on top of Ted's.

"Roll dem bones!" he commanded, and dropped on one knee.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A PREACHER AT HIS OWN GAME

TED raised his eyes to heaven, blew through his cupped palms, cried "Baby!" in a loud voice, and rolled the white dice out on the hard, yellow clay.

"Three!" exclaimed the crowd with one breath. Fish had won.

"I leave 'em lay," said Fish, picking up the dice. "Fade me for eight dollars!" Ted counted eight dollars and laid them on the eight Fish had left as his bet.

"Who's your poppa now?" cried Fish to the dice, and rolled. They came a four and a two.

"Six my number," said Fish. "Sweet baby wid six teef, smile at yo' daddy now!" He rolled the dice. They came five and two. Fish had lost.

"What's yours is mine," grinned Ted as he scooped up the dice. "I leave dem sixteen dollar lay. Who gwine fade me?"

Fish reached in his pocket and put his re-

maining sixteen dollars on to the pile. "Roll dem bones," he said, and made a rapid prayer.

Ted rolled three and two. "Fever from the South," he cried.

"Fives wore off dem bones," sang Fish. "Dog wid seben teef, bite dat yaller han'!"

Ted rolled and the dice showed four and two.

"Bite him!" Fish pleaded. "Seben dog, if you love me, bite!" He felt a sudden glow of luck, as if he couldn't lose.

Ted shook the dice and rolled them with a long sweep of his yellow palm. They came four and one.

"Five!" Ted chuckled. "Five my number. Who gwine fade me now?"

Fish sat down on the ground with a dazed look in his prominent eyes. His twenty dollars had gone. No twenty dollars, no honeymoon. While Ted rolled the bones experimentally with gloating flourishes, Fish unlaced his yellow shoes, took them off, and placed the glory of their natural hair tops in the betting ring.

"Ten dollars," said Fish.

"Ten dollars," agreed Ted. He blew into his cupped hands, cried "Baby!" in a loud voice, and rolled a seven.

"What's yours is mine!" Ted chuckled as he drew in the shoes. "What else you got?"

Fish feverishly put down his hat, tore off his baby-blue celluloid collar and shrill red tie, whipped off his coat and threw that on the pile. "Luck gotta change some time," he breathed, wiping the fine beads from his disappearing brow. "Ten dollars."

"Ten dollars it is," agreed Ted. He raised his eyes to heaven, blew into his cupped hands, cried "Baby" loudly, and rolled a seven.

"Natural!" The crowd murmured.

"What's yours is mine," repeated Ted, with hypnotizing certainty. "You got anything else?"

Fish stared with hanging chin at the smooth yellow clay with the little cracks baked by the sun. Surely that was not the same earth of twenty minutes before. Surely this was not the same rose-colored world he had been walking through all morning. He shook his head.

"I ain't got nothin'."

"Turn out yo' pockets," commanded Ted, who loved the game more than the money. "Ain't you got a knife or a razor or a pair of knucks—or nothin'?"

Fish, with a wild surmise of hope, turned

out his side trouser pockets, but ejected only some crumbs of tobacco and a wooden collar button. Then he delved into his hip pocket, but could produce only the marriage license and the ruby wedding ring.

"What dat ring?"

"Dat my weddin' ring."

"Put her out dere. Weddin' rings is lucky. Five dollars 'gainst a weddin' ring."

Fish, praying for a turn in the tide of luck, placed the ring beside Ted's five dollars. Ted went through his habitual incantations and rolled an eleven the first shot—thus again achieving a "natural."

"Dat am de naturalest nigger I ever did see!" exclaimed Lawyer Little in admiration. "Fish," he added, "what's dat paper?"

"Marriage license," mumbled Fish.

"How much you fade him for dis license?" Lawyer inquired of Ted.

"Ten dollars," chuckled Ted. "Den all what I needs 'll be a gal an' a minister."

Lawyer snatched it out of Fish's hand and threw it on the ground.

"Roll him for it, Fish. Git all yo' things back. License ain't gwine do you no good 'thout a coat and shoes."

Fish, too dispirited to protest, watched in fascination as Ted blew into his cupped palms, rolled his eyes to heaven, and cried: "Baby!" The white dice shot out of his yellow palm and curveted to a stand.

"Dat nigger done roll three naturals in concussion," remarked Lawyer in awe. "Fish, dem bones done convince me dat you ain't meant fo' a gambler."

"Dey convince me, too," agreed Fish in a weak voice.

Shrunken in stature, chin on chest, Fish slunk away close to the buildings, on his way to his room where he might find, anyhow, an old pair of shoes and a hat. But as he shuffled mournfully along he couldn't evade the thought of what Macedonia would say when he told her they wouldn't be married that night. It was out of very dark brooding that he was aroused by a clap on the shoulder.

Preacher Jackson, his dim old eyes shining, shook Fish's hand endlessly. "Whar you been, boy? I been lookin' for you dis past hour. Sister Jones, she done brung me a fowl to fry. It look powerful like dat pullet Mister Greenberg los' las' week," the old man chuckled, "but when de Lord send chicken dat ain't no time

to question de workings of Providence." Then the dim eyes began to notice Fish's costume and demeanor. The preacher looked at him in silence for a moment. Then: "Nigger, is you seen Lawyer Little and Ted Harpy?"

Fish looked at the ground.

"Is dey done took de very clothes off yo' feet?"

"Dey got my weddin' ring." Fish began to sniffle. "Dey got my marriage 'tificate!" A tear coursed halfway down his ebony cheek.

Preacher lifted his hands and eyes to heaven.

"Ain't I done tole you!" he wailed. "Whar you leave dem two niggers?"

"At de san' lot."

"You go in de house an' set down. I gwine take my foot in my han' and I'll be back directly."

In the dusk of the preacher's parlor the still duskier Fish sank into a corner and became merely a pair of white eyes and a sniffle. Perhaps half an hour of blinking and sniffling passed before Preacher returned.

To the sniffle in the corner the preacher said:

"Dat Ted Harpy want me to marry him to Macedonia to-night at seben o'clock, 'stead of you. I tole him to meet me dar. I want you to be dar, too."

A muffled sound came from the dark corner.

"Don't ask me no questions. You do like I tell you. Come on in de kitchen, now. We'll draw dat chicken."

But Fish, overwhelmed by the discovery of Ted Harpy's intention, rose and shambled out into the street. For the first time in his life chicken had become a mere word, instead of an intoxicating experience of the spirit. Thus he proved to the watching gods the sincerity of his love. He shrank into an alley, followed its devious winding, scaled a board fence, and attained his sunny room unremarked by friends. There he reclined upon the rickety cot, crossed his right foot over his left knee, and mournfully regarded the high visibility of three toes, till slumber soothed his woe.

Fish awoke to find the sun vanished. The clock in the window of the grocery store across the street said ten minutes of seven. He hastened to the alley, without waiting to find shoes or hat, and within five minutes, breathing heavily, slipped along the lane leading to the rear of the church and knocked timorously on the peeling green paint of the wooden door. The door was snatched open by Preacher Jackson, and Fish stumbled into the parson's

dim dressing room. A glass coal-oil lamp with a pink porcelain shade cast a circle of light on an old desk, and Fish discerned the globular bulk of Lawyer Little and the more shapely dimensions of Ted Harpy.

"I been asleep," Fish muttered.

"Dat nigger, he could sleep in a patrol wagon!" Lawyer snorted in disgust.

"Man gotta sleep, ain't he?" retorted Fish, snapping his eyes. "Man ain't like a gudgeon, keeps his eye open all time."

"We ain't got no time to be argufying," Preacher Jackson interrupted. He cleared a space on the old desk. "You Ted Harpy, you want me fix marriage for you wid Miss Clinton, ain't you?"

"You done said jes' what I wants."

"You done read de Bible, an' you knows what de good book say: 'A eye for a eye and a toof for a toof; what shall be won by de sword shall be lost by de sword.' I gwine fix dat for you on one condition."

"Name them one."

"I gwine put up de fixings as a stake. You win an' I fixes. You gwine put up a stake de money an' clothes you won from Fish Kelly. I win an' them is mine."

"What sort of church business is dis?" demanded Lawyer Little in a high voice of protest.

"Leave him be," interrupted Ted Harpy, his eyes shining at the prospect of a game. "What's his is mine. Here is de shoes and de hat. Roll 'em an' call 'em."

Suddenly the organ in the church began to roll forth Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and through the door that separated the Preacher's room from the chancel came the shuffling of many feet. Lawyer Little tiptoed to the door and opened it. "De bride at de door," he announced in a loud whisper. "Everybody standin' up."

Preacher Jackson had resurrected from a pocket in his shiny black suit a pair of red celluloid dice, and he shook these in one withered bony hand.

"Read 'em an' weep," he cackled as he rolled them on the desk. They came a seven.

"Natural seben," said Ted Harpy. "Them is yours now, but mine soon. I puts up de coat an' de collar an' tie. Roll dem bones."

Preacher worked his toothless gums against each other in excitement and blew into his claw-like palm. From the shadows of the

doorway Lawyer's whisper pierced the triumphant strains of the organ. "De bride done started up de aisle; her pa 'longside. Everybody looking for de groom!"

The dice clattered on the desk and became still.

"'Nother natural!" breathed Ted. "Never try to beat a preacher at his own game."

"Read 'em an' weep," whispered Preacher Jackson. "Put up dat license and de ring."

"De bride done reached de pulpit steps," announced Lawyer from the doorway. "Somebody come quick an' marry dis 'ooman!"

Ted placed the marriage license and the heart-shaped ruby ring on the edge of the desk. On these he laid his roll of bills. "Fade me everything on dis throw," he whispered. "Here where I wins me a family or a job of work."

Lawyer's voice was insistent. "Dat yaller girl flingin' her head high. She ain't gwine wait at de church for no nigger. Somebody better hurry."

Fish clung weakly to the edge of the desk. His eyes protruded even father than was usual, and he touched a dry tongue to his prominent white teeth. Preacher blew into his palm, shook the dice, and rolled them on the desk.

Ted Harpy sat down suddenly in a chair. The dice again had come seven.

"Put on dese clothes," Preacher snapped as he jabbed Fish's arm into the sleeve of the coat. "Put 'em on an' follow me. I'm gwine out dar an' hold 'em where dey is."

Fish, stunned by the sudden change of events, struggled into the yellow shoes, put on the high celluloid collar and shrill tie, and felt his spirits rising and the world brightening with each added feather of raiment. He ran a finger and thumb up and down the crease in the trousers, pulled down his coat and his shirt cuffs, took up the license and the roll of bills, put the ring in his vest pocket, and tucked the new felt hat under his arm.

A breath of appreciation rose from the congregation as Fish strode into the church chancel and, elbows, shoulders, knees and feet moving in perfect syncopation, reached the side of the bride, where he snapped his heels together, gave Preacher Jackson a military salute, and stood at attention.

"Dat nigger sho' can pick 'em up an' lay 'em down," Benny Hooton remarked for the second time that day.

After he had joined them in matrimony,

Preacher Jackson raised his hand in benediction and spake a parable that only he and Fish understood.

"Once dey was a man what went wrong from a red cause. An' den in later life he had a chanct for to do good wid dem same red cause—to do good to a man what saved his Only. An' he done good. An' de Lawd bless you an' keep you. Amen."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE HORSE WITH THE SILVER LINING

AFTER Fish had strutted down the aisle with the lady on his arm, he found himself bundled into a small closed car, with Mr. Clinton at the wheel. Macedonia was proved a prophet. The destination was the Clintons' house, which soon was alive with a chattering, giggling crowd of guests, and the food that Mr. Clinton provided, not to mention the blackberry wine, proved that gentleman a good loser.

While the festivities were at their height, Fish and Macedonia slipped unnoticed out of a side door, and Mr. Clinton himself drove them to the Virginia Beach train.

Eleven Queen Street, thereafter, became to Fish like a little corner of heaven. It was warming to the heart to have a wife, a home, of his own. Lawyer Little—perhaps through fear of Mr. Clinton—after a few unsuccessful overtures had left him alone, and Fish had been living a peaceful and uneventful life, a

life he liked. The days, the weeks, drifted by unregarded, and it was in the most contented state of mind one morning that he flapped his generous feet up Queen Street in the direction of Mr. Greenberg's store.

Yellow sunlight bathed the ancient dwellings, sagging of step and crooked of shutter, that bounded the worn brick sidewalk; sparrows hopped and chittered over the grassy mid-street cobbles. The world was at peace. And then a hiss, like the hiss of a rattlesnake, seemed to fall from the clear blue sky.

Fish jumped, looked rapidly about, and descried above him, in the second story window of a rickety frame dwelling, a small animated black face. He recognized Jockey Johnson, and grinned. The little rider put a scrawny finger to his bulging lips and motioned Fish to come upstairs and join him. Then he immediately withdrew his head.

This air of mystery did not appeal to Fish. His nature was melancholy, rather than adventurous, and he entered the narrow hall and mounted the creaking stairs with misgivings. His tar-colored features were set in opposition to any and all innovation as he entered Jockey Johnson's room.

Jockey, a diminutive figure clad in a green suit, with a diamond horseshoe pin in his red

necktie, greeted Fish cordially and confirmed the fact that they had not met since the races at the county fair, a year ago. But his next words quenched the answering cordiality that had risen in Fish's bosom.

"Is you seen Lawyer Little?"

Fish answered "No," by which he meant he had kept Lawyer Little from seeing him.

"I been lookin' for him," Jockey went on eagerly, "'cause here's a chance to make a pile of money, and I wants him to help us."

"What kind of money?" asked Fish with quickened interest. Money seemed of particular value to Fish at that time. The truth is in escaping the dominance of Lawyer Little he had come into a subservience even more hateful. As the months had passed, Mr. Clinton gradually had taken on again his air of irritation and contempt. Of late he had spoken without reserve. His daughter had married a man "who never would do nothin' but push a cart." The apparent truth of this assertion had kept Fish mute. But he had dreamed dreams; and Jockey's mention of a "pile of money" caused his eyes to glisten.

"Lissen," Jockey replied. "You know dat big race what's coming off dis afternoon at de fair grounds? Well, who's de favorite?"

"Lady Nicotine goin' win in a walk. Dat's what dey say."

"Yeah. But dat ain't what *I* say. Boy, I gwine ride a horse what can run dat Lady Nicotine ragged. And don't nobody know it but me an' my white man boss."

"How come dey don't?"

Jockey rose and tiptoed to the door to see that no one was within earshot.

"Boy!" Jockey pulled his chair closer. "My horse run de legs off Lady Nicotine down in Louisville. But den he was a white horse!"

"Ain't he a white horse now?"

Jockey laughed loud and long.

"I'll say he ain't! Naw, suh! My boss man's wife, she changed her hair from gray to brown. My boss man say: 'How you do dat?' She tell him. Den he take dis horse, dis white horse, an' he change him from white to brown. Yas, suh. All but his ears and his forehead. Den he call me, an' he say: 'Jockey, here a new horse. Try him out. His name Silver Linin'.' But, Law, chile, dey got to do mo' dan change dat horse's color to keep me from knowin' him when I got a leg up."

"I'll say," agreed Fish, admiring the other's technical knowledge. "But I don't see what dat got to do wid money."

"Naw, *you* don't," Jockey acknowledged contemptuously, "but Lawyer Little would. Why, boy, dey bettin' ten to one against Silver Linin'!"

Fish swallowed his prominent Adam's apple. The thought of putting up one dollar and getting back ten made his mouth water. It sounded like dreams coming true.

"What you want me to do?"

"I want you to tell Lawyer Little to get a lot of money and come to de track at three o'clock and see me. I can't go lookin' for him. White man boss tole me to stay in dis room an' not speak to nobody till race time. If he see me on de streets he sho' would bus' me open."

"What you say is de name of dis horse of yourn?"

"His name Silver Linin'. But he ain't gwine win dis race 'less Lawyer see me 'fo' he bet. I got to make some money, too."

"And where does I come in?"

"You an' Lawyer fixes dat."

"I'll tell him," said Fish. He rose and went down the creaking stairs, his easily aroused imagination already handling large sums of gold. But as he flapped in search of Lawyer, and drew nearer his goal, he grew less san-

guine. He could not remember, among the numerous projects in which he and Lawyer had joined, any occasion when Lawyer had disclosed even a chemical trace of generosity. Fish's hopefulness entirely departed when he finally sighted the rotund Mr. Little in a chair in front of Benny Hooton's barber shop.

Lawyer's dusty and greasy opera hat rested bottom up on the brick pavement. The mellow sunlight made shiny headlights on his close-cropped conical skull and gave a sheen of green to the old frock coat which once had been black. Lawyer's original chin was resting on his lower chins in an attitude of sleep, but as Fish came into his line of vision his eyes opened suddenly and his brow corrugated in a frown which to Fish seemed to spell unmitigated ferocity.

"Mornin', Mr. Little," offered Fish weakly.

Lawyer glared at Fish for a moment in silence. Then:

"I jes' been thinkin' about you," he said unpleasantly. Lawyer bitterly resented the ostracism that Fish had been practicing against him and—not unlike the rest of mankind in similar circumstances—he had been trying to prove to himself that *he* had been ostracizing *Fish*.

"Me?" This was not good news. Fish, to relieve his melting knees, sank on to the edge of a chair a safe distance away.

"Yes, you! You heard me!" Lawyer snarled. "You Doctor of Jonahrosity!"

"Me—what?" asked Fish, startled.

"You heard me. You's a regular perfessional Jonah. You's a Doctor of Jonahrosity."

Fish's already prominent eyes seemed about to come entirely from their sockets.

"You—you mean me?"

"Yes, you! You bug-eyed shadow of nothin'! I jes' been thinkin'. Ever' time I had anything to do wid you, I got in trouble. Ever' time!" Lawyer glared fiercely. "When you interduced me to dat hypnotizer, a tiger had to get loose an' come in de theater. Next you got me into dat mess of trying to get Big John Henry's life insurance. Said you seen him daid on de river bank. And Big John Henry come back to life and nearly kilt me wid a pistol. Den was dat time we brought in liquor in a coffin, and 'cause you was wid us, de liquor got sent to a funeral and I got sent to jail. Den was de time me an' Ted Harpy took dem alarm clocks, and de things began ringing in our pockets right dar befo' de judge. Once mo' I goes to jail."

There was a disagreeable silence.

"Mr. Little—" began Fish weakly.

"Lissen," Lawyer interrupted. "I want you to keep 'way from me. Every time I talks to you I git in trouble. If I was to let you touch my rabbit's foot it would turn into a rattler's tooth. Don't never cross my path no more, 'cause if you do"—an expression of pleasure came over Lawyer's face—"I gwine kill you whar you sit."

"Mr. Little," said Fish desperately, "I knows a chance to make a lot of money. All you got to do is raise 'bout a hundred or a thousand dollars, an—"

With a gurgle of rage, Lawyer leaped to his feet and swung his chair over his head. But with great rapidity Fish had zigzagged across the street and disappeared up a lane.

"Dis earth is twice too small for me an' dat nigger both," Lawyer muttered as he dropped the chair to the sidewalk. With a grunt, he picked up his opera hat, put it on, and waddled down the street toward the Liberty Lunch Room in search of food. Just as he opened the rusty screen door of that fragrant hostelry he encountered Jockey Johnson coming out. Jockey looked quickly up and down the street for any sign of his white boss.

"Lawyer," he said, "I ain't got no time to hesitate. Meet me at de race track at three o'clock an' I'll tell you a sure ten-to-one shot. Bring your money wid you."

Lawyer watched Jockey's green suit and white felt hat till they turned the corner. Then he entered the lunch room and gave himself over to appetite and meditation.

He knew Jockey Johnson of old. They had pulled many a trick together, and Jockey's judgment of good things was almost infallible. But Jockey's error this time lay in supposing that Lawyer had any money. And the fact that riches were within his grasp, but that he was unable to grasp them, threw Lawyer's mind into a state of irritable activity. His irritation was not lessened by the sight of Fish and Macedonia as they entered their ground-floor rooms across the street. And, to make his irritation almost unbearable, presently floated across the street a cheerful song in Fish's quavery tenor, accompanied by syncopated chords from Macedonia at the piano.

"Him singing!" muttered Lawyer with bitterness and disgust, and he presently saw Fish and Macedonia leave the house. "Him wid a piano!"

But the mention of the piano seemed to

bring beauty and light into Mister Little's thoughts. He slapped his knee, chuckled, paid his bill, put on his opera hat, and waddled rapidly out of the restaurant and several blocks down the street to a wooden stable that housed Charley's day-and-night express.

Followed a brief colloquy with the amiable Charley. A few moments later the day-and-night express, with Lawyer seated beside Charley on the driver's seat, rattled along Queen Street and drew up with a flourish before Fish Kelly's residence.

Lawyer and Charley dismounted, entered the house, and shortly staggered forth, carrying a brightly varnished upright piano. This was loaded into the uncovered express wagon, the dejected clay-colored horse was urged into a convulsive trot, and with Lawyer standing and keeping the instrument in balance, they started on their journey to Mr. Meier's music store.

Lawyer was in high spirits until, having turned into Monticello Avenue, he espied the uniformed bulk of Police Officer Johnson at the next corner. Officer Johnson, he knew, would be unduly inclined to consider his connection with any article of property as a suspicious fact, requiring investigation. So he

called to Charley to slow up, clambered down to the street, and waddled along the sidewalk.

When he and the parallel express wagon were passing Officer Johnson, and as he was bestowing upon that cold worthy his deepest and most ingratiating bow he was struck chill by hearing a stentorian summons from Charley.

"Hey, Lawyer!" Lawyer pretended not to hear, and quickened his step.

"Hey, Lawyer! Come ketch your piano quick!"

Charley had stopped at the crossing and was blocking traffic. The piano had slipped to the rear of the wagon and was threatening to topple over.

Lawyer had no choice. Perspiring profusely from nervousness, conscious of Officer Johnson's thoughtfully suspicious eye, he pushed the piano back into the wagon and climbed in after it. From that point till they reached Meier's music store he maintained, with more vigor than dignity, the unequal contest with a heavy piano determined to slide down the wagon's inclined plane. He mopped his slanting brown forehead, told Charley to wait outside, and entered the store for a conference with Mr. Meier.

## CHAPTER XVI

### JONAH HIMSELF

THAT aquiline-featured gentleman admitted that Fish Kelly was buying a piano from him on the installment plan, and, upon referring to his books, found that so far the payments, several of which had been made by friends as wedding presents, amounted to four hundred dollars. How much would he allow if the piano was returned?

"Vell, if in perfect condition, two hundred dollar maybe. But who iss you?"

"I'se Mister Kelly's lawyer. He is in a little trouble, and he got to have de money quick."

The piano was unloaded and proved to be as good as new. Mr. Meier was used to the irregular ways in which the colored people did business. He imagined that Fish was locked up and needed bail money. So Lawyer got two hundred dollars, signed a receipt, paid Charley two dollars, and caught the first trolley for the race track.

"If dat skinny nigger find out I took his

pianny," he chuckled, "I tells him I borrowed it.. I cleans up two thousand dollars, at ten to one, and pays him right back his two hundred."

The car soon arrived at the high board fence surrounding the race track. Lawyer dismounted, brushing by the yelling hawkers of programs and dope sheets, bought a general admission ticket and went through the turnstile gate. His nostrils fairly quivered as he inhaled the exciting race-track atmosphere of contest and chance.

Above him the white folks' boxes and grand stand, opposite the starting line, were packed with a colorful, noisy gathering of fine ladies and gentlemen. Crinkly money was in evidence, and passed from hand to hand. Field glasses of all dimensions were leveled at the bandaged racers warming up on the track, or hung in leather cases from tweed shoulders. An irregular procession wormed its way to and from the bookmakers who, like spiders, had attached their booths to pillars in the promenade beneath the stands.

Lawyer concluded that several races had been run, and had started hastily toward the stables when he felt a hand on his arm. It was Jockey Johnson. His diminutive frame

was arrayed in a blouse of bright orange and trousers of apple-green laced tight over the calves, and on his small black head was a peaked jockey's cap of orange and green stripes.

"Where's dat money?" asked Jockey.

"What's de name of dat horse?" demanded Lawyer.

"How much does I get?" Jockey first wanted to know.

"I couldn't raise but a hundred. I'll split it wid you. Is it a sho' thing?"

"As sho' as a horse race ever is," grinned Jockey, grabbing the five ten-dollar bills. "Bet all you got on Silver Lining. Dat's what I am gwine do."

He darted off in the direction of the book-makers.

A closing in of the crowd prevented Lawyer from following so quickly, but he pushed slowly along with the scores of others who were anxious to get their bets placed for the next race on Lady Nicotine, the favorite. As the press converged at one of the booths he became subconsciously aware of a familiar presence. He looked round and had a sudden sinking feeling at finding Fish Kelly at his elbow.

Fish seemed equally uncomfortable at being so near Mr. Little. But a sudden surge of the crowd thrust him forward till his black face was within six inches of Lawyer's.

"Go 'way," said Lawyer.

"I can't go 'way," retorted Fish. "Somebody pushin'."

"Don't talk to me! What you tryin' do, ruin my luck?"

"Mr. Little, I jes' want do you a favor."

"I don't want no favors. I jes' want you go 'way," retorted Lawyer excitedly. The gambler in him was on top. "Every time I do what you say I lose. Go 'way!"

But Fish could not relinquish this opportunity to reinstate himself in the eyes of his old compatriot. To be believed to be a Jonah would be as bad, or worse, on Queen Street, as having leprosy. The crowd had pushed them past the booth and Fish saw a chance to speak and, if necessary, run.

"Mr. Little, I kin tell you what horse gwine win dis race."

Lawyer glared at him.

"Go 'way! I don't want to hear nothing."

"Mr. Little, dat horse called Silver Lining gwine win dis race. Dat's what I was tryin' tell you dis mornin'."

Lawyer's jaw dropped.

"You mean tell me you bettin' on Silver Lining?"

"Yas, suh."

Lawyer groaned aloud. He remembered suddenly Jockey's words: "As sho' as any horse race ever is." He knew of no reason why Silver Lining should win, except Jockey Johnson's tip. And now he knew that Silver Lining was Jonahed.

Through the crowd he caught a glimpse of Jockey's orange and green cap, and rushed over to him.

"Jockey, war dat money? Silver Lining Jonahed!"

Jockey's eyes and mouth opened wide; his blackness grayed.

"How come he Jonahed?"

"I seen a perfessional Jonah after him. Bet dat money on another horse."

"I done already bet."

"Den sell de ticket."

From the region of the stable came the clanging of a bell.

"Here," cried Jockey, thrusting a pink slip into Lawyer's hand. "You sell it." And he darted away.

Only a few minutes remained for the placing

of bets. The horses already were entering the track. Lawyer found a booth.

"How much you give me for dis pink ticket?"

"Forty dollars."

Lawyer pushed his hundred and fifty dollars across the counter with it.

"Put de whole hundred an' ninety on Lady Nicotine, to win," he instructed. And, having got his ticket, he hurried out to the track

He found a place on the rail around the track, and calculated his financial situation. The odds on Lady Nicotine were three to two, so aside from what he would have to give Jockey, the bookmaker would return to him only two hundred and thirty-five dollars. Assuming that the worst happened, and he must return two hundred dollars to Mr. Meier, to save trouble, this would leave him a profit of only thirty-five dollars. Thirty-five dollars as compared with the two thousand in prospect before that Jonah appeared!

While the horses, with their bandaged ankles, made ready for the start, a fat colored gentleman in an opera hat sat on the race-track rail and plotted murder.

Lady Nicotine was a beautiful bay mare with ears and feet Arabian in their smallness.

The two next favorites were handsome horses, one a sorrel, the other brown and white. There were two additional entries. And then came riding from the paddock Jockey Johnson, on a rangy horse of a strange russet, almost a henna color, but with white ears and forehead.

There were two false starts, and then from a thousand throats came a stirring roar:

"They're off!"

Lady Nicotine, next to the rail, was ahead. Lawyer could see the number four placarded on the jockey's back. The next two favorites were next; and fourth, squatting like a monkey over his horse's shoulders, came Jockey Johnson on Silver Lining. Pressed so close together that it seemed inevitable they must trip and fall, they clattered round the first turn in a cloud of dust. Lawyer let out a terrific yell:

"Go it, Lady!"

And like a distorted echo he heard from near by a quavery tenor:

"Go it, Silver Lining! Bring me back my five dollars, and fifty mo'!"

Lawyer was making a mental note of the point from which the tenor voice had come when he was surprised to feel a heavy clasp on his shoulder. He was still more surprised

when he looked up and saw the gray mustache and blue helmet of Officer Johnson.

Lawyer tried to smile a smile of welcome.

"Push right up, Ossifer, an' see de race."

"You is under arrest."

"Me?" inquired Lawyer in a high voice of astonishment. "How come?"

"For stealin' Miss Fish Kelly's pyanner, which I done had taken back to her."

"Oh," smiled Lawyer wanly, "dat was jes' a joke." He dismissed the subject with a wave of the hand.

"You can tell dat joke to de judge," returned Officer Johnson, "de same time you tell him de joke about gittin' two hundred dollars from Mr. Meier on false pretenses."

Lawyer had paled perceptibly.

"Lissen, Mr. Johnsing. I got a bet on dis race, and I kin pay back all dat money. Jes' wait till dis race is over."

"What horse you bettin' on?" inquired the officer, taking a precautionary grip on Lawyer's sleeve.

"Number fo', dat one what's leadin'."

The horses were two thirds round the track, which had to be circled twice. Lady Nicotine was leading by half her length. Next, neck and neck, came the second favorite and Silver

Lining. The remainder of the field straggled out hopelessly behind.

"Oh, you Silver Lining!" came a quavery tenor yell as the horses flashed past the post on the first lap. But there seemed to be no change in position. Like toy horses fastened to a base, they neither gained nor lost, till three quarters round the second lap.

Then something began to happen. Silver Lining drew ahead of the second favorite by an inch, then by six inches, then a foot. Next his wide nostrils were even with Lady Nicotine's shoulder. The second favorite was forgotten. The boxes, the grand stands, rose to their feet with a shriek and a roar.

"Go it, Lady! Come on, Silver!"

The race was almost over. There was barely a hundred yards to go. Silver Lining gained another half an inch, an inch. His russet muzzle was now level with Lady Nicotine's bit. The crowd groaned. He gained an eighth of an inch—a quarter—a half—

They flashed by the post while the crowd went wild.

"Who won? Who won?"

The judges conferred. Then the marker slipped a number opposite first place. The

number was six. Number four got second place.

Jockey Johnson on Silver Lining had won.

"Dat judge crazy," said Lawyer faintly. "Dat horse—"

"You lose," interrupted Officer Johnson without sympathy. "Let's git out of here 'fo' de crowd."

Too dispirited even to converse, Lawyer allowed Officer Johnson to lead him in the general direction of ninety days in jail. The hundred and ninety dollars had gone up in dust. And he would have been two thousand dollars ahead if it hadn't been for that Fish Kelly—that Jonah!

Mr. Kelly—the Jonah in question—was collecting his winnings at the bookmaker's window, his black face creased into a dazzle of white teeth and shining eyes. Fish put the unexpected fifty dollars in his pocket and turned away with a widening grin. He would find Lawyer Little, and prove that he was no Jonah. But the grin faded. Round a pillar beneath the stand came Mr. Clinton, a scowl on his square yellow face. He hadn't seen Fish yet—but if he did, he would want to know: "Why ain't you at work?"

Fish ducked into the crowd, murmuring:

"Some day, I ain't gwine have to run from nobody!"

He made his way as fast as possible to the gate. Just outside, he was lucky enough to spy Lawyer Little, walking along with Police Officer Johnson. Fish pushed near them and touched Lawyer timidly on the arm.

"What I tell you, Mr. Little?" he exulted. "Didn't I tole you dat horse would win? You see now I ain't no Jonah, don't you?"

The annihilating right swing that Lawyer aimed at Fish's delighted countenance threw the unsuspecting Officer Johnson three feet out of plumb. But its only other effect was to add wings to Fish's feet. In less than three seconds he was at a perfectly safe distance. But it was longer than that before he could persuade his limbs to slow down to a walk.

Then, between puffs, he muttered:

"Dat Mr. Little, he sho' am a curious man. He ain't *never* satisfied with *nothin'!*"

## CHAPTER XVII

### AN HEIR TO THE HOUSE OF KELLY

THE fiction heroine whispers it into her husband's ear, and blushes. Mrs. Macedonia Clinton Kelly did not blush. Her complexion, several shades darker than olive, would have made blushing difficult. But, nevertheless, it became known to the ebon Mr. Fish Kelly that he might shortly expect a descendant.

This was all right, had it stopped there. But unfortunately, as Fish saw it, the news spread. It came to the ears of Macedonia's oppressively respectable parents. And Mr. and Mrs. Clinton, who openly evidenced their opinion that Macedonia had married beneath her, now descended from their Olympian heights and began taking a personal and authoritative interest in their anticipated grandchild.

"Momma wants we should go to her house to live," remarked Macedonia one evening after the supper dishes had been washed.

"Dis place good 'nuf for me."

"Poppa he wants us, too."

Fish, his retreating chin offering no obstacle, rested his lower lip on the tips of his blue celluloid collar, sank farther into his chair, and blinked his protruding eyes in gloomy subjection.

To Fish, Mr. Clinton had become the embodiment of everything fearsome. In the first place, he was some sort of assistant to the commonwealth's attorney. Then he had an extremely dignified abdomen, across which was swung a gold chain of a size Fish associated with handcuffs. His vocabulary had the effect of paralyzing thought, especially when accompanied by a terrifying stare through a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. And, worst of all, he was "light complected." He looked down upon Fish from an unscalable precipice of color. Fish sometimes wondered if his whole life was to be spent in fear of one person or another.

"I don't care if he do," Fish began with weak belligerency. But Macedonia interrupted.

"Pull yo' vest down an' go open de door. Dere's poppa now."

Fish's white teeth gleamed and his black face crinkled into an ingratiating smile as the

bulk of Mr. Clinton appeared in the doorway, but his father-in-law ignored him.

"Well, you ready?" he demanded of Macedonia.

Macedonia folded away the little white sweater she had been knitting, and gave a pat to her high-coiled glossy hair.

"Yes, poppa," the astonished Fish heard her say. "The trunks has gone over, and there ain't anything now but this suit case. Fish, get your overcoat, and put the suit case in poppa's car."

Fish, taken back by the rush of events, and not daring to pout, did as directed, and waited outside by the little coupé until Macedonia and Mr. Clinton came out. Mr. Clinton locked the door to their rooms and put the key in his pocket. He compressed his large figure into the driver's seat and Macedonia sat beside him. Fish, knowing what was expected of him, cranked the engine, which, after a few turns, buzzed busily; then he climbed into the rear. They started with a sudden jump and proceeded to bump along the cobbles of Queen Street, followed by many respectful and envious glances, duly appreciated by the passengers.

At Monticello Avenue they turned and Mr.

Clinton stalled the engine on the car track, causing a motorman to shoot on his air brake and make personal remarks.

"Gentleman self-starter, dat's me," Fish muttered as he demounted and cranked.

They got going with another and longer jump, coursed suddenly ahead with hair-raising speed, and skidded round the next corner.

"I sho' is fond of walkin'," confided Fish to himself. "Le'me out. I ain't in no hurry."

Mr. Clinton, although visibly perspiring, began to whistle, as though to indicate a debonair self-confidence. At the next crossing, having failed to slow up, he was forced to dash between two taxicabs that were approaching each other. Whistling louder, he stepped on the accelerator and left the astounded and stalled taxi drivers to hold their indigation meeting.

"Take me back home, Lightnin'!" Fish whispered at Mr. Clinton's fat neck. "I was built for travel by foot."

To Fish's relief, after a few more blocks of interesting travel, Mr. Clinton drove across the sidewalk by a white clapboard house in Huntersville, and into a miniature garage.

With Fish lugging the suit case, they

crossed the lawn and entered the house through the French windows that opened on the side porch. Out of the semi-darkness of the interior came from the buxom Mrs. Clinton a glitter of gold-bridged eyeglasses and the command of a sharp voice:

"Fish Kelly, you wipe your feet. Don't come tracking mud on my carpets."

And Fish knew that he was in the camp of the enemy.

The Clintons were a kindly couple, but between them and Fish, aside from the fact that he had married the apple of their eye, there was an irreconcilable conflict of temperament. Since the dawn of history, the easy-going, shiftless, happy-go-lucky individual has been anathema to the lovers of convention.

To Fish, mashed potatoes and gravy had a special relish if conveyed to the thirsting lips on the wide blade of a steel knife; but as Mrs. Clinton watched him thus engaged she thought uncomfortably of sword-swallowing, and wondered if there was any safe and secret way of putting poison in a guest's coffee. Fish entered the seventh heaven of Mohammed when he spent the afternoon in a state of coma on a soap box in the sunshine. But when Mr. Clinton passed Greenberg's delicatessen

and saw Fish with his egg-shaped head lolled on one shoulder and his mouth open in an ecstasy of slumber, he felt an almost irresistible inclination to use the toe of his boot.

Fish's appetite did not prosper under this battery of critical eyes. He looked forward to when he and his increased family should return to the freedom of his own roof. So, after a week of sullenness that verged on rebellion, he viewed with interest a day of sudden activity.

The telephone was kept busy. As a result, first appeared a comely nurse, bearing a suit case. Next came Doctor Hebbs with a black bag. And just when things were getting interesting, Mr. Clinton interviewed Fish and advised — nay, instructed — that imminent father — who considered himself an integral factor in the situation — to betake himself downtown and not return until dinner time.

Fish, therefore, went out into the wind and sunshine and shambled downtown, his black suit flapping on his gangling black frame, his lips pouted, and his mind revolving the speeches of defiance with which he should have annihilated Mr. Clinton had he only thought of them in time.

At dinner time he returned, and Mr. Clinton

personally conducted him upstairs to Macedonia's bedroom. There on the pillows, her bronze arms gleaming against a salmon-pink negligée, lay Macedonia, a little paler than usual; and in the crook of her arm nestled a minute replica of Fish himself.

Fish's depression evaporated in a tremendous grin.

"Dat's my chile, all right. He's *black!* Ain't he cute? Li'l' Fish Kelly Junior, Number Two. Dat's us. Fish Kelly—an' Fish Kelly. One an' one is two. Sho' do look natural."

Mr. Clinton, who had taken the color of the new arrival as a personal affront, interrupted sternly.

"The child's name, Fish, is William Randolph Clinton, after its grandfather."

"Who say its name is dat?" demanded Fish in a high voice of anger. "Whose chile is dis? Is dis yo' chile?"

"Macedonia is in no condition to be disturbed by such an insane argument," returned Mr. Clinton. "I think we had better leave her now, so she can sleep."

Fish, opening and shutting his eyes as a symbol of deathless defiance, kissed Macedonia, said "Good-by, little Fish," and followed Mr. Clinton downstairs.

For the balance of that week the contest raged. Macedonia, recuperating slowly from her ordeal, took no sides. Mr. Clinton, recognizing in Fish the iron obstinacy of a gentle nature once aroused, proposed toward the end of the week a compromise.

"Very well," he said, as they sat around the table after supper. "We'll call him William Randolph Clinton Fish Kelly."

"Dat chile he named Fish Kelly," returned Fish stubbornly.

"Well," Mr. Clinton offered, "we'll call him Fish William Randolph Clin—"

" 'Tain't no use changin' 'em round. Dat chile he named Fish Kelly, an' dat's all."

" 'Little Fish'—that's what they'll call him," snorted Mr. Clinton in disgust. "What's a little fish? A gudgeon. Gudgeon Kelly. That's a fine name, now, ain't it?"

"Gudgeon grow up to be a fish, don't he?" inquired Fish.

Mr. Clinton threw up his hands.

Days passed and Macedonia was still abed. Fish was finding the daily evening meal a terrible ordeal. Mrs. Clinton still had an ambition to correct Fish's table manners, and Mr. Clinton presided at the feast in a grim silence that shrank the appetite.

Wednesday evening Fish shuffled mournfully up Queen Street and with a yearning eye looked at the locked door of his own home. He was turning to wend his way to the Clintons' when from across the street came a jovial halloo. It was Lawyer Little, his rotund figure clad in the green, long-tailed coat, his round, bacon-colored countenance wreathed in a Bacchanalian smile; and on his head, at a perilous angle, sat his greasy opera hat.

Fish was in a mood to greet even Lawyer Little with acclaim; he crossed the cobbles and shook hands.

"How you, Mr. Little?"

"You mean how is you?" answered Lawyer heartily. "Dey tell me you got a chile what is named for its gran'pappy."

"My chile named Fish Kelly," returned Fish, losing his smile.

"Don't snap dem turtle eyes at me," chuckled Lawyer, delighted at the success of his thrust. "You feel like a little drink?"

Fish hesitated. Since his marriage he had foresworn liquor and craps. But Macedonia was now a neutral, and himself a prisoner, in the hands of the parental enemy. The choice was between a happy evening with Lawyer,

or an evening under the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Clinton.

"You ever know a Fish what wouldn't drink?" he answered.

Lawyer laughed loudly.

"You's a good nigger if you is skinny," he chuckled. "Come wid me. I'se driving a truck for a white gemman. He in de revenoo officer business. Never did see a white gemman what had so much liquor to sell. He pay me my wages in liquor. Never did have a job whar I got better wages. President Bryan sho' did do good when he brung in prohibition. Settin' pretty! In here."

Lawyer led the way up a dark staircase and unlocked a door on the next landing. It opened into Lawyer's chambers—a small room with a single window, two straight-backed chairs and, in the corner, an iron cot.

Lawyer locked the door from the inside, and then produced a pint flask of whisky from each hip pocket.

"Drink hearty, when dis goes dere is mo' whar it come from."

Fish released his prehensile lips from the mouth of the bottle with a gasp and a cough.

"Sho' is good liquor."

"Sho' do drink like you think so. Pass me what little is lef'."

The first bottle shortly stood empty. Fish went out and purchased some cheese and crackers at Mr. Greenberg's. On his return he found Ted Harpy, the yellow-skinned giant, assisting Lawyer in finishing the second. Conversation grew in volume and loud laughter welcomed every sally.

The convivial Lawyer kneeled before the fireplace and, reaching up into the chimney, drew from some invisible source a third pint bottle. More laughter. Ted Harpy produced from the breast pocket of his tattered flannel shirt a pair of dice and rolled them experimentally upon the floor. Fish threw down a quarter; Ted covered a dime of it and Lawyer fifteen cents.

Outside, corner lamps began to sputter palely in the twilight; inside, the game was on.

Fortune visited first one of the trio, then another, and it was two o'clock in the morning before all of the cash in the room had found its way into Ted Harpy's breast pocket. And it was then, for the first time, that Fish began to consider seriously the matter of his responsibilities as a son-in-law and father.

Saying farewell to Ted and Lawyer, he stumbled down the narrow stairs, into the deserted street, and began shambling, somewhat unsteadily, homeward. The brick sidewalks, never in good repair, were poorly lighted between the corner lamps, and Fish's progress was like that of a ship in a stormy sea, and was accompanied by loud complaints addressed to the dark-blue, starlit heavens. The cool air cleared his faculties, however, and he arrived at the front door of the white clapboard house with a depressing sense of having merited criticism, and with a sudden sickening realization that he had no latchkey.

He backed off and surveyed the windows with the flash of a wild hope that perhaps Macedonia was waiting up to throw a key to him. The windows showed no hint of Macedonia. Fish pictured a dinner scene, Mr. and Mrs. Clinton saying what they thought about a son-in-law who stayed out all night while his wife was still abed with a week-old baby. If he should ring the bell, it would be just as bad. Obviously, his only hope was to get into the house without being detected. Then, in the morning, opinions might differ as to when he had returned.

He backed off still farther, and walked

round to the side of the house. Fortune was with him. A sturdy latticework ran up the corner pillar of the side porch, and a second-floor window—the window of the spare bedroom—was wide open.

Fish swarmed up the white latticework, with great care to be noiseless, got his elbows on the porch's tin roof and wriggled himself aboard it. He crossed the roof on his toes, but at each step the tin crackled loudly. He reached the black square of the window without mishap and had just clambered through it when he received the greatest fright of his life.

A woman's piercing scream, in accents of the wildest terror, came from the opposite corner of the pitch-dark room he had entered.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### APOLOGY ACCEPTED

FOR the fraction of a second Fish stood still in the cold paralysis of fear and shock. Then, noticing by a faint gray indication of light that the door of the room was ajar, and his mind urging him instinctively to the safety of his bed, he dashed through the room and into the hallway of the second floor, slamming the bedroom door on the shrieks behind him. He fled, without pausing, into his own room to the right, pulled off his overcoat, jumped into bed and drew the covering up to his chin.

While the shrieks, which were getting louder and more terrified, continued to resound through the silent house, Fish shut his eyes tightly and tried to persuade himself that he was asleep. By now his first fear was over and he remembered that the spare bedroom, which he had entered so unconventionally, had been given over to the use of the comely trained nurse. In a few minutes came cautious

footsteps in the hall, and Mr. Clinton's voice could be heard inquiring rather weakly:

"Who's there?"

The light in the hall flashed on, and in another moment Fish, with his eyes tightly closed, felt a hand roughly shaking his shoulder.

"Get up, Fish! They's somethin' the matter."

Fish, clutching the bedclothes tightly to his chin, opened his eyes to see Mr. Clinton, in a red-and-white bath robe, holding a flash light in one hand and a pistol in the other.

"What is it?"

"The nurse is screamin'. Somebody must be after her. Man, don't you hear her?"

"Sho' I hear her," agreed Fish. "Why don't you go in dar an' see what's matter?"

"Come on, git up. We'll go now."

"You go," suggested Fish, who felt that it would be a mistake to climb out of bed fully clothed, "while I gits dressed."

"She's nurse for yo' chile," retorted Mr. Clinton in an indignant whisper. "Come on, git up!"

"You hired her," Fish argued.

"There's Macedonia openin' her door when

she ought not to git up. I goin' put her to bed, and you better be up 'fore I gits back."

The screams of the nurse continued undiminished while Mr. Clinton crossed the hall to reassure Macedonia; but Fish had a moment in which to rush to the closet and slip on his long, gray bath robe over his street clothes. Holding his bath robe tightly closed, Fish then joined Mr. Clinton in the hall, and, keeping close together, they approached and opened the nurse's door.

"What's matter, lady?" Fish inquired.

The nurse by now was hysterical. But after the light in her room had been lit she managed, between tears, shrieks and convulsive giggles, to explain. She had been awakened by some noise. A tall man was standing between her and the window. He had dashed into the house. He must be in the house now. More shrieks. Mr. Clinton must not leave her.

"We got to search the house," Mr. Clinton concluded. "Fish, you take the light and I'll follow you with the gun. If anybody hit at you, I'll shoot him."

"You got the pistol, you go first."

"Den you take the pistol," replied the lawyer.

Fish, with unwonted courage, took the pis-

tol and led the way downstairs. They turned on the lights, but the first floor showed no signs of having been disturbed in the slightest by an intruder. They went down into the cellar, which was likewise unoccupied. Fish, by an error of judgment which he did not at once realize, led the way up the steep stairs from the cellar, and Mr. Clinton saw that he was wearing, not only his street shoes, but his trousers as well.

Mr. Clinton, in the light of these facts, grew suddenly thoughtful.

"Gimme that pistol," he demanded. "What time did you git home last night?"

" 'Bout ten o'clock."

"I didn't go to bed till ten-fifteen my own self. I didn't see nothin' of you."

"Must 'a' been 'bout ten-twenty when I got here," Fish corrected nervously. "I seen de lights go off when I come up de street."

"How you git in? You ain't got no key."

"De do' warn't locked."

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Clinton disagreeably. "If it warn't locked, that's the first time in twenty years it warn't. How much liquor you had?"

"I ain't had none."

"You must have fell into a river of it den. You smell like Mr. Rye hisself."

"I don't neither," Fish retorted.

"You'd argue you warn't dead if you was," said the disgusted father-in-law. "I'm goin' to make sure whether I locked that door or not."

Fish, who by now had almost convinced himself that a burglar had entered the house, went rebelliously upstairs while Mr. Clinton opened and shut the front door and examined the lock. Fish had hardly reached the second floor when, with renewed screams, the nurse came rushing out of his room.

"He's in there, Mr. Kelly. They's a man's coat on your bed."

Fish dashed into his room and saw his own overcoat, lying where he had thrown it over the foot of his bed. There was no time for indecision. He took up the coat; and seeing that the nurse had flown into Macedonia's room, he threw it out of his window into the night.

Mr. Clinton meanwhile had breathlessly reached the head of the stairs, and he ran into Macedonia's room to discover the cause of the renewed excitement. Fish Kelly joined them.

"They ain't no coat in my room," said Fish.

"Dey must be," cried the nurse, whose black color during the vicissitudes of the last twenty minutes had turned a leaden gray. "I jes' seen it, I tells you."

Convoyed by Fish and Mr. Clinton, the nurse cautiously thrust her head into Fish's room. The bed was there, plain in the bright electric light, but no coat was on it. This was a little too much. The nurse took a deep breath and quietly collapsed into the arms of the portly Mr. Clinton.

"What sort of goings on is this?" cried Mr. Clinton, endeavoring to maintain his balance. "First they's a burglar, then they ain't. Next they's a coat; then they ain't. Fish, take hold this woman's feet. Somebody crazy round this place."

"Well, it ain't me," said Fish belligerently.

They deposited the inert nurse upon her bed, and Mr. Clinton, leaving Fish with her, went into Macedonia's room to assure Macedonia and Mrs. Clinton that there was not any burglar and that there was not any coat. In a few minutes Mr. Clinton returned and announced, with as much dignity as a red bath robe and bare feet would permit:

"Fish Kelly, yo' wife want to see you."

Fish immediately broke out with a cold

perspiration. The gentle Macedonia was slow to wrath, but once aroused she was a long time cooling off. The prospect of his one ally turning against him in the house of his enemies changed his knees to water as he followed the large red bath robe and bare feet into the council chamber. Macedonia, sitting up in bed, and flanked by the hostile figure of Mrs. Clinton, came with wifely directness to the point at issue:

"Fish, did you climb in the nurse's window?"

Fish clutched his bath robe tighter.

"Who? Me?"

"You heard me," Macedonia repeated.

"What would I be doin' climbin' in her window?" Fish was working up his indignation. "How I gwine climb in her window? I ain't no wild cat."

"Fish, I don't want no back talk. Did you or didn't you?"

Fish angrily blinked his prominent eyes.

"You know I ain't climbed in no window."

"Will you give me yo' word?"

"Sho' I will."

"Fish," said Macedonia, unconvinced, "will you hold up your hand and hope the Lord will

strike me and our little baby daid if you climbed in dat window?"

Fish was cornered. Faced by father-in-law, mother-in-law, and wife, all of whom he had severely frightened, and each of whom would never have forgiven him, how many men would have had the moral courage to confess? How many men, of whatever race, would have crossed their fingers and taken the oath?

"Sho'," Fish reiterated.

"Say it after me," Macedonia instructed. "I hope to de Lord—"

"I hopes to de Lawd—" Fish repeated.

"Dat my little baby an' my wife is struck daid—"

"Dat my li'l' baby an' my wife is struck daid—" said Fish.

"If I climbed in de nurse's window. Amen."

"Amen," echoed Fish, after he had repeated the oath. And Macedonia sank back satisfied.

"We better get ourselfs some sleep," she said.

Mrs. Clinton went in to see that the nurse had recovered. The lights soon were extinguished, and Fish, under the coverlets of his bed, heard the house once more sink into silence.

But sleep did not woo him. Macedonia, he

knew, had accepted his oath, but he was equally sure that Mr. Clinton had not. And he did not know how long her conviction would last in face of the persuasive array of facts that Mr. Clinton would be able to adduce. Then he was suddenly shot through by a thrill of horror.

His overcoat, supposed to be the burglar's overcoat, was out on the lawn.

With the forced cunning of a wild, hunted creature Fish lay perfectly still until he felt that the exhausted inhabitants of the house had sunk into a heavy slumber. Then he stealthily rose, took his shoes with him in his hand, because pavement and lawn would be clammy with dew, crept as softly as he could down the creaking stairs, and let himself out into the foggy night.

He put on his shoes and slunk round the house to where his overcoat, a blacker spot in the general blackness, lay on the lawn beneath his window. He gathered it up and was starting back when he was struck by a thought.

If the burglar's coat had come out of the window, the burglar must have come the same way. From the second-story window to the soft lawn was not a far jump for an active man,

and Fish's acting before his family had almost convinced him a real burglar existed. To assist in the illusion, Fish jumped up and down until he had made two deep footprints where the presumptive burglar landed; then he made heavy footprints running from that spot across the lawn to the cement driveway leading from the garage.

Convinced that he had done his poor best for a hopeless situation, Fish returned to the front door, removed his shoes, and crept back upstairs and into bed, where he sank presently into a troubled slumber.

The next morning any faint hope he might have had as to the attitude of his parents-in-law was quickly dissipated. Mrs. Clinton slapped the fried eggs down before him as if she wished the table had been his head. Mr. Clinton's countenance, somewhat haggard from lack of sleep, seemed a plump mass of concentrated bitterness.

Fish shuffled disconsolately downtown and tried to lose his depression by a vigorous handling of the meats and vegetables he delivered that morning to various households. But the depression would not lift. At lunch time he sank weakly upon a box of canned

tomatoes in the rear of the store and gave himself over completely to gloom.

By nature Fish was inclined to look upon the darker side of events, and his present involvement was of a kind to confirm the worst of his fears. He had a vision of himself, a brow-beaten unbefriended creature, creeping like a criminal in and out of his own home, until, with a final gesture of disgust, Macedonia and her parents would cast him forth to shift for himself, a vile thing unfit for human communion. It was with a sickening thump of the heart, therefore, that he heard Mr. Greenberg calling him.

"Fish, your vife's fadder out here looking for you."

Fish, with dragging feet, went forward like a victim to the gallows. In the sunlit street, where his stylishly dressed father-in-law awaited him, the dignity of Mr. Clinton's abdomen had never seemed so overpowering.

"Fish," said that worthy without hesitation, "I have come to see you about something which I am afraid will surprise you."

Fish, in imagination, packed his trunk.

"I have come, Fish," continued Mr. Clinton in his round, mellow voice, "to ask you to forgive me."

Fish's eyes seemed to emerge slowly from their sockets.

"Who? Me?" he asked.

"Yes, Fish. Last night, I must confess, I believed you had climbed in the nurse's window. But this mornin' my wife and I was round to the back of the house and we saw where a man had jumped from your window, on the second story, to the ground. We could see where he landed. And from there his footprints was plain across the lawn to the concrete driveway."

Mr. Clinton paused, removed his derby hat, and mopped his light-brown brow with a blue-and-white handkerchief.

"I am a just man, Fish. I have done you an injury. Now, to make things even, I want to withdraw my objections to calling my grandchild, Fish Kelly. But, first, I want to ask you to accept my apology."

"Sho'," agreed Fish.

He accepted Mr. Clinton's apology and Mr. Clinton's proffered hand as one in a daze. And, still in a daze, he watched Mr. Clinton's broad back until it disappeared round the next corner.

Slowly, however, a grin dawned over his

inky countenance, a grin that developed into loud laughter, accompanied by a slapping of the knee. The story was too good to keep. Endeavoring to control his insane giggles, he drifted down Queen Street in search of the appreciative Lawyer Little.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A STRANGE WHISKY BOTTLE

THREE months had dragged past and Fish and Macedonia were still living in Huntersville with the Clintons. At the moment, Fish was looking at the distinguished abdomen of his "light-complected" father-in-law, adorned by a gray vest across which was swung the heavy chain which looked like gold. Fish knew that if he raised his popped eyes he would see a square, belligerent face of light yellow, a cropped mustache, and a terrifying glare through a pair of horned spectacles. So he let his eyes stay where they were. Mr. Clinton was a lawyer, but to Fish he always had the unpleasant aspect of a justice of the peace. Not that Fish ever associated him with either peace or justice.

"You done los' yo' job at Mister Greenberg's delicatessen account of laziness," Mr. Clinton snapped. "Don't interrupt me! You spends three hours a day eating me out of ham and

chicken. An' you won't do nothin' when I asks you. Ain't you never had no raisin's? Or did yo' mammy drag you up by de scruff of de neck?"

Fish blinked his prominent eyes as an argument in rebuttal and pouted his long lips.

"I ain't no nurse," he muttered.

"You ain't no nothin', dat's what's de matter wid you," retorted the lawyer.

They were standing in the yellow sunshine before Mr. Clinton's neat, white clapboard house in Huntersville. Between them, in a white reed baby carriage covered with mosquito netting, Fish Kelly, Junior, aged three months, and the cause of all the fuss, lay calmly on his pillow, like an egg-shaped drop of ink, and sucked industriously on an empty rubber nipple.

"You know Macedonia got to help her ma in de kitchen," went on the father-in-law; "and you know dis baby ought to git some fresh air. An' you don't want to roll him, 'cause you say it ain't a man's job. Well, den, I'll give you a man's job. If you don't want to roll dis baby, den you brings me thirty dollars for dis month's board." Mr. Clinton's voice rose to a bellow. "I ain't gonna have no long, skinny,

gloomy nigger settin' roun' my house eatin' all day, I don't care who he married."

For a wild moment Fish contemplated turning on his run-down heel and walking defiantly away. But his mind recalled the plump chicken that had been killed for dinner, and the fit of madness passed. He grasped the handle of the baby carriage and began pushing his offspring up the granolithic sidewalk, away from the more thickly settled colored residential district.

"Don't go dat way. It's too rough," commanded the grandfather.

Plotting murder, Fish wheeled the carriage and proceeded slowly in the direction of public ridicule and humiliation. The grandparents looked with such adoration on their minute grandchild that Fish was afraid it would be a long time before he and his increased family might return to the peace and freedom of their room on Queen Street. But, for once, he was glad he was not on Queen Street. Out here he would stand less chance of being seen by any of his cronies.

But there were other things as bad. The day was Sunday, and the windows of the scattered unpainted dwellings seemed to be full of comely colored ladies. Fish had a weakness

for desiring to shine before the opposite sex, and if his color had been any lighter than coal tar, he would have blushed rosily as he shuffled behind the conspicuous carriage. To his ears the air was full of imaginary titters. He pulled his black slouch hat farther down over the potatolike undulations of his cranium, pouted his lips, blinked his eyes, and tried to forget his appearance by conjuring up complicated curses on his father-in-law.

He had just finished wishing that Mr. Clinton would break a mirror, lose his rabbit's foot, and have his path crossed by a black cat, when his attention was diverted by rude shouts of laughter. At the street corner Lawyer Little and Ted Harpy were clinging to each other in convulsions of mirth. Lawyer Little's greasy opera hat had slipped to the back of his conical head and his round, bacon-colored face was creased with mirth and pain. He pressed his hands to his sides.

"Take him away," Lawyer gasped, his spherical body in the old, greenish, long-tailed coat shaking like jelly. "He's killin' me!"

"Miss Fish Kelly out fo' a walk wid her baby," chuckled the giant Ted, his shoulders gleaming through the tattered sleeves of his blue shirt.

Fish blinked, then grinned sheepishly. "What's matter wid you all?" he demanded. "You crazy?"

Lawyer took out a red-and-white handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and erased some of the shine from his countenance.

"Boy," he cried jovially, "what you doin' now? Done stop pushin' vegetables an' took to pushin' babies? Is dat it? Well, why not? He yo' baby, ain't he? He got to have some air, ain't he?" Lawyer was too kindly to keep up a jest too long. "How come you ain't down at Mr. Greenberg's?"

Fish grinned. "He fired me when he heard 'bout de new sto'."

"Heard 'bout what new sto'?"

"My new sto'," returned Fish, grinning more broadly.

"What's dis? What's dis?"

"Mr. Clinton he gwine set me an' Macedonia up in business. We gwine have a delicatessen lunch room all for our own selfs. How's dat?"

"Dat takes money," remarked Lawyer, much impressed.

"Sho' it do! Mr. Clinton gwine put a thousan' dollars into it. Say he want a business for Little Fish, Junior, when he grow up."

"Sho' mus' think a heap of dat chile."

"He think more of dis chile dan he do of his right eye," Fish expanded proudly. "Dat's de reason I pushin' him now. De place whar we gwine have de lunch room ain't vacant till de first. Mr. Clinton say I got to push dis chile, else I got to pay board."

"You want to make some money?" asked Lawyer suddenly.

Fish sobered. He was well aware that Lawyer, while splendid at invention, was poor at execution. His schemes usually had an explosive quality that caused their participants to end up just one jump ahead of Police Officer Johnson. To say truth, Lawyer had spent a total of no inconsiderable period as a guest of the city, and his good health might justly have been attributed to an occasional month devoted to repairing the county roads. But every man, they say, has his price; and there were few things Fish would not have done at that moment to earn thirty dollars.

"Sho' I wants to make some money," Fish replied. "But I don't want to git in no trouble."

"No trouble; no trouble at all," Lawyer hastened to assure him. "Just a little idea o' mine, an' you are 'zactly de man we need. Come on, let's go up to 'Hammer John's' new place an' talk it over."

They pushed Fish, Junior, up the side street to a yellow shanty on the corner of a cluttered-up lot. A bearded white goat, tethered to a stake, chewed on a sheet of tin, and watched them gravely. Fish parked the baby carriage in the rear, where it could not be seen by a passing father-in-law, and entered the cool, moist interior of Hammer John's new place. They sat down at one of the three wooden tables. Lawyer called, "Three shots, Hammer," and from a fragrant den at the rear Hammer John brought them tea cups half filled with a cloudy, greenish fluid.

"Down wid liquor!" suggested Lawyer, and Fish swallowed his portion, which seared his throat like a hot iron.

"Double distilled," said Lawyer, smacking his lips. "A man's drink. Lissen here, Fish Kelly."

Lawyer's scheme, which he proceeded to unfold, had all the earmarks of an idea that had hatched in that crafty gentleman's mind: a scheme by which things were equally divided —his partners took the risks and he took the profits.

"Dey ain't no trouble sellin' dis stuff by de bottle," explained Lawyer. "Dat's easy. De trouble comes in gittin' it delivered. Dey's taken to stoppin' trucks an' pushcarts an'

everything. A cullud gemman ain't got no privacy, not even in his hip pocket."

He knocked on the table for another round of drinks.

"But I done hit on a fine scheme. I done bought me a pretty white baby carriage. Yas, suh. Look jes' like dat one o' yourn. Got white coverin's and a 'skeeter nettin'. Ain't no cop gwine lif' a baby's 'skeeter nettin' lookin' for liquor. Naw, suh!" Lawyer cackled loudly. 'Fraid he make dat baby cry, an' its ma come out an' bus' a milk bottle on him. All you got to do," he said to Fish, "is push de baby carriage full o' liquor to de address I gives you. Officer Johnson ain't gwine ask *you* what you got."

Fish thought heavily. "S'pose he do?" he inquired.

"If he do, which he ain't, all you got to say is a tall, thin, cullud gemman give you a quarter to push de carriage to a place."

"S'pose he take me to jail?"

"Dat's easy." Lawyer dismissed this with a wave of the hand. "Jes' tell it to de judge."

"S'pose de jedge don't b'lieve me?"

"What's matter wid you?" snapped Lawyer, angered, as was usual, by Fish's logic. "You'd find trouble in Heaven! Does you want to make money or don't you?"

"How much does I git?"

"You gits a fourth of all de profits."

Fish pondered. "A fourth," he remonstrated. "An' I runs all de risk. How much is twice fo'?"

"Twice fo' is eight," answered Lawyer, frowning.

"A fourth ain't enough," Fish stated emphatically. "I ought to git twice dat."

"You git twice dat, an' I puts up all de money for de liquor!" cried Lawyer. "An' I furnishes de customers, too!"

"All right," said Fish. "I ain't anxious git in no trouble, nohow. You git somebody else. I ain't gwine push no liquor in a baby carriage 'less I gits a eighth of de profits, an' dat's dat."

"'Less you gits how much?" asked the astounded Lawyer.

"Dat's what I said. A eighth I gits, or I don't push nothin'."

Lawyer hid a grin behind his tilted teacup. He had not expected a windfall from Fish's weakness in mathematics. "All right," he assented magnanimously. "You gits a eighth, den. I wants my frien's to make money when I do. A frien' of mine is a frien' o' mine."

The liquor, and this unanticipated financial

success, fired Lawyer's imagination. He was used to dominating Fish, and he thought of putting him to further profitable uses. Half-formed ideas began scuttling around in his mind like rats in a garret. Of a sudden one of them became fully formed and leaped out into the conversation.

"You say Mr. Clinton think a heap of dat baby?"

"He think mo' of dat baby dan he do of his health," said the proud father.

"Have another drink," urged Lawyer, pushing his own half-filled cup across the table. "I'll be back in a minute." He waddled out to the rear of the building, where Ted Harpy had gone a few minutes before.

Fish drank Lawyer's health and began to feel strong. The cobwebby room suddenly seemed beautiful. He rose to his tall, thin length, thrust a hand into his black vest, and began to sing in a high, quavery tenor:

> I got wings, you got wings,
> All God's chillun got wings.
> When we git to heaven gwine to 'just our wings
> An' fly all over God's heaven—"

He was interrupted by a large, callous palm that clapped itself over his mouth. Hammer

John was using language in his ear. "I jes' opened dis place 'cause dey run me out of downtown. You tryin' git me run out o' here, too?"

Fish, displeased at having his singing interrupted, impacted his fist against Hammer's flat nose. Hammer had grasped him by the neck and was on the point of annihilating him when Lawyer Little rushed up and, with some difficulty, interposed his bulk between them. He hastily led the still belligerent Fish out to to the rear of the shanty and fastened Fish's hands to the handle of the baby carriage.

"Go home, 'fo' Hammer kill you."

"Hammer an' what army?" demanded the temporary lion, resisting.

"Time you took dat baby home, anyhow," added Lawyer, the tactician.

Fish, realizing that perhaps this was so, pushed the baby carriage, which seemed to him somehow strange, down the incline to the sidewalk. At the corner he turned to shake a farewell fist, and was surprised to see Lawyer Little's globular form waddling hurriedly in the opposite direction. Half a block in advance of Lawyer and just turning a corner he descried a white baby carriage. It had disappeared before he identified the man who pushed it.

"Maybe dat was me pushin' it," Fish mur-

mured; then chuckled at the way his thoughts were twisted. He cocked a glassy eye at the sun. "Time dis baby was gittin' another bottle. Wisht I had some cloves."

He still more regretted the absence of the cloves when he saw Mr. Clinton awaiting him in front of the clapboard house, and he tried the expedient of holding his breath.

"How come you a half hour late?" snapped the thickset father-in-law, who was enjoying his Sunday by supervising the details of his household.

Fish let out his breath all at once and almost bowled Mr. Clinton over. "I was talkin' business wid a gemman."

"Yeah," snarled Mr. Clinton. "Your breath smells like business. It's a wonder my po' little gran'child ever got dis old wid such a father. Go in de house an' git dis baby's bottle."

Fish retrieved a nippled bottle of milk from its pan of warm water and delivered it to the grandparent. Mr. Clinton pushed back the wicker awning from the baby carriage and raised the mosquito netting.

"What's dis?" he demanded. "You got dis baby's head covered up?" He lifted the

blanket—and then cried: "Whar's my baby? Whar's my Little Fish?"

Fish leaned forward and looked into the carriage with mouth and eyes agape. In it lay merely a white blanket and an unfamiliar pillow. Mr. Clinton stripped it of the blanket and disclosed a brown, dispirited whisky bottle, uncorked and empty.

"Dis ain't my baby carriage!" shouted the infuriated grandparent. "You go git my baby 'fo' I kills you."

But Fish, already on the way back to Hammer John's at a high rate of speed, turned the corner so fast that he skidded, and he appeared so suddenly over the edge of the incline that the white goat stood on its hind legs and bleated a bleat to the effect that it would sell its life dearly. But Fish was brought to an abrupt pause at Hammer John's doorway, which was filled with Hammer John.

"Whar my baby!" panted the excited parent.

"Does I look like him?" asked Hammer unfeelingly. "Las' time I seen him you was pushin' him down de street. If he beat you back here, he's de fastes' movin' baby I ever seen."

"Don't projec' wid me, Mr. Hammer," Fish

pleaded. "Mr. Clinton waitin' wid de bottle in his han' and I ain't got no baby to fit to it."

"Is you really los' dat baby?" Hammer began to display some interest. "How come?"

"I jes' ain't got him—dat's all!"

"When de last time you looked in de carriage an' seen him?"

Fish pondered. "I ain't seen him to-day at all," he confessed. "But Mr. Clinton say he was in de carriage when he give de carriage to me."

"Den you don't know whar you los' him," announced the experienced Hammer. "He mought 'a' clumb over de back of de carriage an' crawled off into de weeds. Jes' de same as wid me an' my goat. I los' him an' I didn't know when or whar. But I foun' him easy enough."

"How did you find him?" inquired Fish eagerly.

"Jes' put a advertisement in de paper. Dat'll fin' anything quick as a wink."

"Sho' 'nuff?" Fisher grasped wildly at this straw.

"Right off," Hammer assured him. "Wait till I locks up an' I'll go wid you to see de cullud gemman what runs de *Clarion*."

## CHAPTER XX

### SHOTS AT NIGHT

A HURRIED walk of several blocks brought Fish and Hammer to the ink-smeared shack that housed the *Clarion,* but the editor was out. A cinnamon-colored pickaninny, however, helped Hammer to find the issue in which his advertisement for the white goat had appeared, and deprived of the editor's literary guidance they were forced to use this as a pattern. After twenty minutes of great mental stress they left the following advertisement for insertion in the next issue:

> LOST.—One baby. Color, black. Marking, black. Size, very little. Answers to the name of Little Fish. When last seen was being pushed up Church Street by his father. Finder return to Mr Clinton, Huntersville, and receive suitable reward.

Fish's generous feet shuffled more and more slowly after he had parted from Hammer and came in sight of his thickset father-in-law who,

milk bottle in hand, still waited beside the strange babyless carriage in front of the white, clapboard house. Mr. Clinton had been pacing up and down, and when he caught sight of Fish, empty-handed, he strode toward him.

Fish's knees turned to water, and his thoughts turned to prayer. Things had happened so rapidly since he took those drinks, he was only beginning fully to realize that Little Fish was lost, and that he would be blamed. Unable to justify himself, he hastened to think up an excuse.

"Whar my baby?" shouted Mr. Clinton.

"What baby?" asked Fish, sparring for time.

"What?" Even the lawyer, experienced in repartee, lost his bearings at this sally.

"I means my gran-baby what I give to you jes' now in dat other baby carriage. Dat's what I mean."

"What other baby carriage?"

"Is you crazy?" demanded Mr. Clinton.

"Dat's de baby carriage you give me. I ain't had my han' off it."

"If you ain't had yo' han' off it, how dat baby git out widout you seein'?"

"Dey mus' warn't no baby in it."

Mr. Clinton put his hands on his hips and stared.

"Is you crazy or is me?"

"Well, I ain't," retorted the father. The hot sun was beginning to give effect again to the green lightning he had swallowed, and his courage began to rise. "You give me a baby carriage an' tole me to push it or not eat. I pushed it. I done my share. I didn't see no baby in it when you give it to me."

Mr. Clinton was nonplussed. He remembered now that he had found the covered carriage in the shade of the house, had rolled it from there to the sidewalk, and had then called Fish. He was not sure he had actually seen Little Fish in it.

Before the conversation could proceed further, the comely light-brown Macedonia, high-coiled hair gleaming in the sun, strolled from the house to inspect the feeding of her infant.

"Was Little Fish in the carriage?" Mr. Clinton asked her.

"Sho' he was."

"Den somebody done stole him," said Fish.

Macedonia looked from one to the other, then let out a scream that brought Mrs. Clinton's gray hair and gold spectacles to the window.

"Let's go inside and figure out what to do," suggested Mr. Clinton weakly, putting an

arm round his daughter. In the parlor, Mrs. Clinton tried to calm Macedonia, who was on the verge of hysteria. Mr. Clinton sank heavily into a chair and Fish took a remote seat with a despondent conviction that Fate, as usual, was laying a trap for him.

Macedonia had calmed sufficiently to demand the details from Mr. Clinton, when there came a ring at the doorbell. Fish stumbled over two chairs and returned with an envelope. As his education had never proceeded so far as reading and writing, he turned the missive over to Mr. Clinton. And Mr. Clinton, in a voice of mingled fear and indignation, read the note aloud:

Yore gran'baby will be returned safe an' sound if you put one thousan' dollars in the Lighting Stump at nine o'clock to-nite. If you tell the perleece, or try any funny tricks, yore baby's th'oat will be cut from year to year and we will deliver his gizzard to you by return mail. Awaiting your reply we are respectfully the black hand.

Mr. Clinton passed the note to the trembling women. At the bottom of the penciled scrawl was a roughly drawn hand.

"Lawdy! Lawdy!" moaned Macedonia. But Mrs. Clinton after reading the note was less impressed.

"Some tricky nigger," she decided. "We ought to 'phone de police an' have 'em watch dat Lightning Stump all night. Den dey'd ketch him when he come for de money."

"But," objected her husband, "the letter say if we tell de police—"

"He ain't goin' commit no murder an' git hung for it," Mrs. Clinton interrupted.

"An' I ain't gwine take no chance on his doin' it, neither," snapped Mr. Clinton. "Dat baby is worth more dan a thousan' dollars to me."

"Lawd, yes!" chimed Macedonia.

"What I gwine do is dis," announced the lawyer. "I gwine put one thousan' dollars in real money in the stump, like he say. Den he can't have no excuse for doin' Little Fish no harm. An' I ain't gwine tell de police, 'cause he might have a frien' at de police station what would inform him of it."

"Dat's right," echoed Macedonia.

"You ought to tell de police," repeated Mrs. Clinton.

"Naw, suh," retorted Mr. Clinton. "Better let 'em have dat thousan' dollars I was gwine to put in de lunch room for him when he growed up dan have de lunch room an' no Little Fish."

"Who brought dis note?" inquired Mrs. Clinton suddenly.

"A boy," said Fish.

"Would you know him if you seen him again?"

Fish pondered. "I didn't pay him no mind."

"Ain't dat jes' like dat good-for-nothin' nigger," cried the father-in-law. "Fish, you come outside. I got somethin' to talk to you 'bout."

Outside, Mr. Clinton, with a guarded look toward the house, murmured to Fish:

"Go up in de attic an' git my shotgun. Clean it good, an' put it behin' de storm door whar we can pick it up when we go out tonight. Put my pistol wid it. I'm gwine downtown an' git dat money an' git some shells for de shotgun. You be here when I git back, an' don't say nothin' to de ladies."

Fish, his eyes protruding with excitement, gloomily went indoors and climbed the stairs to the attic. To his mind the situation was getting less and less satisfactory. He had not the slightest yearning to exchange shots with any member of the Black Hand. His idea was to put the money in the Lightning Stump while there was yet some cheerful daylight, and then leave the stump as rapidly as might be. By the use of some finesse, however, he had man-

aged secretly to cache the shotgun and pistol behind the storm doors before Mr. Clinton returned for dinner.

That meal was not a gladsome affair. Macedonia ate with an appetite increased by grief, but Fish was haunted by the fear that this meal might be his last; and Mr. Clinton brooded upon the intrinsic value of a thousand dollars. Only Mrs. Clinton seemed to have preserved a normal equanimity.

Time passed for Fish all too swiftly after dinner, for eighty-thirty came and found him with a revolver, and Mr. Clinton with a shotgun, walking along beneath the stars. Mr. Clinton's house was on the very frontiers of the suburb of Huntersville; and the Lightning Stump—a charred heaven-struck remnant of a weeping willow—sat a mile away in the center of lonesome fields. The two unwilling adventurers soon had left the granolithic walk, and were stumbling through tangled grasses. After twenty minutes of darkness and silence, during which Fish's blood had gradually become congealed with fear, the demonlike shape of the stump suddenly lifted its withered arms before them.

"Lissen." Mr. Clinton's usually strident voice had shrunk to a tremulous whisper. "I

puts de money right here. See? Now you goes to dat big stump over dere an' lays down an' waits. I gwine hide over by dat little tree. Den we sees 'em either way dey come."

"How come we can't wait together?" inquired Fish, his teeth chattering.

It irritated Mr. Clinton for Fish thus to voice his own fear. "You do like I tell you," he snapped.

"Well, don't shoot 'less you see somebody."

"Why not?"

" 'Cause when you shoot I runs," Fish announced. "An' I don't want to run 'less I has to, 'cause I might run into somebody."

"You got feathers on yo' legs, you chicken!" Mr. Clinton rasped.

"I ain't lookin' for no Black Han'," retorted Fish, trying to prolong the discussion so as to keep Mr. Clinton with him. "Not on a dark night like dis."

"You got a gun, ain't you?"

"You take both de guns an' let me go home," Fish suggested.

"You git over dere whar you belong!" Mr. Clinton aimed a kick at Fish, and that lean gentleman, preferring a deferred to an immediate danger, reluctantly moved away through the uncanny dark.

He came soon upon his post, beside the clay-incrusted roots of an overturned chestnut, and lay down in the fresh fragrant odor of dewy grass. The darkness about him seemed to hide fierce, black men with phosphorescent eyes, each with a pistol pointed at his heart. The beating of his heart, Fish felt, could be heard a hundred feet away, and he had a creepy sensation that some one was on the other side of the overturned roots. He would have arisen and fled except he was afraid Mr. Clinton would mistake him for a kidnaper and fill him with buckshot.

The feeling that some one was on the other side of the tree roots became stronger and stronger. An unmistakably human, probably colored and possibly familiar odor seemed to touch his nostrils. He could stand the suspense no longer. With the noiselessness of a cat he crawled to where there was an opening, large enough for a man's body, between the overturned roots and the prone tree trunk. Through this he slowly projected his head and shoulders. Emerging on the other side, he peered behind the roots and saw no one. He was just turning to squint down the length of the tree trunk when something weighing about two hundred pounds fell on the back of his

neck and squashed his face into the soft earth. Into his jolted and astounded mind came a hiss of warning.

"Keep still, Fish Kelly. Don't, I gwine cut yo' th'oat!"

The weight on his neck was released and Fish turned his protruding eyes upward. The face fitted the voice and the avoirdupois. It was Lawyer Little.

"Might as well cut it as scare me like dat." Fish crawled all the way through the hole and brushed off his face. "What you doin' here?"

Lawyer chuckled. "Me? I 'tends to git some money out of a stump."

Fish stared. "How did you know?" Then comprehension dawned on him. "Is you a Black Han'?"

"I'll say I is. An' I 'tends to fill my black han' wid money. Lissen. Did he put real money dere?"

"Real money, wid a picture on it an' everythin'," Fish assured him.

"Did he tell de police?"

"Naw, suh. He wanted dat chile's gizzard to stay whar it would do de mos' good."

"Lissen to me," said Lawyer. "Dis mornin' you an' me went in pardners, didn't we?"

"Yeah. I was to git one eight' of de profits."

Lawyer nudged him. "Is we still in pardners?"

Fish thought heavily. He was badly in need of thirty dollars for board money

"We is in pardners," he agreed, "but I got to have mo' of de profits."

"One eight' is plenty when I takes all de risks," Lawyer objected.

"All right, den. We ain't in pardners. You go git dat stump money; den I go git Mr. Clinton; an' den we go an' gits you."

Lawyer repressed his desire to do murder. "How much does you want now?" he demanded.

"What's twice times eight?" asked Fish, whose mathematical powers didn't reach such heights.

"Sixteen."

Cupidity grew in Fish with the sense of victory."How much is twice times sixteen?" he asked.

"Thirty-two."

"Den I gits one thirty-tooth," announced the shrewd trader.

Lawyer tactfully hesitated. Then: "All right," he grumbled. "Now go out an' git dat money."

"Hold on," said Fish. "Whar's my baby?"

"He in his carriage right at de head of de street you live on, in a clump of bushes. I was gwine push him out of de bushes an' let de carriage roll right down de street by itself to yo' house. Now go git de money."

"First I gits my share," announced Fish, gloating upon his brief authority over Lawyer, who usually dominated him.

"You is de mos' unreasonablest nigger!" cried the stout gentleman. "How I gwine pay you 'fo' I gits mine? How we gwine tell how much a thirty-tooth is 'fo' we sees what's dere?"

"Dat's easy. You know how. A fo'th is fo' dollars, ain't it? A eight' is eight dollars, a sixteent' is sixteen dollars, an' a thirty-tooth is thirty-two dollars. An' dat's what I git 'fo' anything else happens."

Lawyer became desperate. He knew the futility of trying to reason with Fish after that potato-shaped black skull had once harbored an idea. He drew forth a wallet.

"Here's yo' thirty-two dollars," he snapped. "Now, will you go git dat money?"

Fish pocketed the bills. "Why should I go git it?" he asked. "It's yo' money. I got mine." He became alarmed at the animal-like sound of rage from Lawyer's throat. "Mr.

Clinton right straight de other side dat Lightnin' Stump," he propitiated. "He can't see you if you keep low."

Lawyer, after a moment of cautious peering, took up his opera hat from where it lay on the grass and, bending over as far as the generosity of his figure would permit, made a bee line for the Lightning Stump and its treasure.

Fish watched him. His bulk had become all but indiscernible when suddenly near the Lightning Stump the darkness was pierced by two arrows of flame, accompanied by the reports of two revolver shots. Lawyer's globular figure became visible above the horizon as he leaped wildly into the air. Then with a sound like the roaring of a great wind, he began returning toward Fish through the high grass with the speed of a deer. Two more shots rang out and again Lawyer leaped high as if vaulting the bullets. He passed Fish like a running cannon ball, and the diminishing noise of his retreat through the shrubbery was like the progress of a hurricane.

Behind Lawyer came pursuing footsteps and Fish experienced an unpleasant thrill of surprise at recognizing the dome-shaped helmet and wide shoulders of Officer Johnson. The

policeman, not having Lawyer's incentive, made less speed through the underbrush, and nearly opposite Fish he tripped and fell. While he was struggling to rise another figure appeared on the scene. It was Mr. Clinton, who cried: "Fish! You, Fish!"

"Dis ain't Fish. Dis is Officer Johnson," said that worthy.

A horrible thought suddenly disturbed Fish in his contemplation of the scene. Lawyer had flown without the thousand dollars. What would happen now to Little Fish? Would the other Black Handers follow out their threat? Thoughtless of consequences, he leaped up and dashed in pursuit.

He heard a yell behind him: "Dar another one!" There came the terrific *bang* of a shotgun and the as yet unscattered shot made unlovely music over his head. He ducked so suddenly he went forward on one shoulder, cutting his forehead on a rock, scratching his face and tearing his coat. He was on his feet in a flash, and his speed increased.

Mr. Clinton let go the other barrel but with no appreciable effect. "I missed him," he said to Officer Johnson in disappointment. "How many was dey?"

"I was fightin' wid six of 'em 'fo' you come

up," said Officer Johnson. "Dat make seven. Well, dey gone now."

"Yes, dey gone," cried Mr. Clinton with heat. "'Cause you done scared 'em! Dey done lef' my thousan' dollars, but dey got my gran'baby! What you doin' buttin' in?"

"Mrs. Clinton, yo' wife, she ast me to," replied Officer Johnson with dignity.

"Ain't dat jes' like a woman," groaned the attorney. "Did she show you dat letter? Now dey ain't no tellin' what's gwine happen to my baby. Like as not dey'll kill him."

"Dat's right," Officer Johnson agreed. "I was readin' in de paper dis mornin' how some Black Handers in Chicago cut off a baby's two arms an' sent 'em home to its pappy."

"Is dat all you got to say," snapped Mr. Clinton, "after you done cause' de baby to be kilt?"

The offended policeman withdrew into a shell of silence and they tramped angrily homeward without further talk. When, still angry, they entered the sitting room of the Clintons' residence twenty minutes later, they were confronted by an astonishing spectacle.

In the ease of shirt sleeves Fish Kelly, his face cut up as though by a tremendous battle, even his shirt torn, was eating freshly fried

ham and eggs off the best parlor table, and being waited on by no less a person than Mrs. Clinton herself. Seated beside him was Macedonia, and in her arms, his long lips fastened to a full bottle of milk, lay Little Fish Kelly, Junior, as lively and as pert and as black as ever.

"Oh, poppa!" cried the radiant Macedonia. "Ain't Fish wonderful? He had a big fight and took Little Fish away from 'em all by hisself."

"How many men was you fightin'?" inquired Officer Johnson professionally.

"Seben," said Fish, his mouth full of egg.

Mr. Clinton sank into a near-by chair. The truth of the matter was that Fish had merely found the baby carriage in a clump of bushes at the head of the street and had rolled it home. But Mr. Clinton was not aware of that, and the correspondence in numbers between the imaginary men Fish and Officer Johnson had fought was convincing. He sat and gazed at his son-in-law in frank admiration.

Later that night, in the darkness and privacy of his bedroom, Fish looked up at the ceiling and allowed his soul to expand. A hero, with a month's board money in his

pocket. No work, no rolling of baby carriages, for thirty days.

"Settin' pretty!" said Fish to himself and grinned.

But as he lay there and thought things over, he remembered Mr. Clinton's favorite remark: "Dat nigger ain't never goin' do nothin' but push a cart."

"I wonder," Fish numbled, and fell asleep frowning.

## CHAPTER XXI

### LOVE POWDERS AND DRAGON'S BLOOD

FORTUNE is fickle. It was not so very long after the recovery of Little Fish that Fish Kelly, in distress, sought out Lawyer Little. And Lawyer Little, despository of wisdom, furnished the key. Lawyer knew a man, who knew a colored lady, who worked for a white woman, who knew another colored lady, who knew a man who was an Egyptian from Egypt. His head was wrapped in silk till it was as big as a watermillion. The toes of his red shoes curled up till they touched his baggy silk trousers. A black cat with fiery eyes sat on his right shoulder and told him what happened by day. An owl sat on his right shoulder and told him what happened by night. The Egyptian from Egypt never ate and never slept. Jes' sat in a dark room lookin' into a big glass ball. In that ball he saw everything that happened. You could dig a hole in the ground and kivver yourself up.

He could tell you de color of yo' necktie jes' de same.

Fish had wormed his way through the intricacies of Lawyer's directions and now stood before the door of the fearsome yaller man from Egypt. The house was one of a row of dilapidated, wooden dwellings on Fenchurch Street. Although the other houses showed the animation of kinky heads, black faces and the whites of eyes, this house was silent and foreboding. Green shades covered its windows and the glass panels of its peeling door. Nailed to its yellowish clapboards was a hand-painted sign. Fish couldn't read the words, but the pictures of bears, bulls, stars, and serpents were sufficiently alarming.

Hollow-eyed from three days of worry, the sweat streaming from his black face to his retreating chin and prominent Adam's apple, his long, skinny frame positively trembling, Fish crept up the four sagging steps and knocked timorously on the door.

For some moments there was no answer. Fish was about to yield to his impulse to flee, when he observed a movement of the green curtain on one of the glass door panels. The curtain raised slowly. It disclosed the startlingly black head and vivid green eyes of a cat.

The cat stared at Fish for a moment; then the curtain lowered again.

"Feet do yo' duty!"

Fish turned and crept across the porch. He had his foot on the first step when he heard the door open behind him. He remained with his foot on the first step as if paralyzed, afraid to look around. He jumped violently when a hand grasped his arm.

"You wish to consult me?" asked a voice with a peculiar accent. "Come this way."

Fish felt himself urged across the porch, through a dark hall and into a darker room, which smelled of Chinese punk and onions. In the dimness, the tall, spooklike outline of the conjurer guided him to a table. Fish was pushed into a chair, and the Egyptian from Egypt sank into a chair opposite. He switched on a lamp which threw a green circle of light on the table between them. A black cat leaped noiselessly from the floor to the table and thence to the Egyptian's shoulder. In the added illumination Fish saw on the other side of the man's turbaned head a small owl, its luminous eyes wide and staring.

"Let me see your hand," said a hollow voice.

And, after he had examined Fish's long, black, trembling member: "This is bad. Worse

than I had expected. This is terrible!" He pushed Fish's hand away as if his peering soul could no longer stand the horrible things it saw. "You had better tell me all you know," he sighed. "Leave out nothing."

Fish blinked his prominent eyes and moistened his lips. He had trouble enough, but it would make a long story. His mind was too paralyzed with dread to be fluent. So he made it brief.

"They's a gal I wants to—" his receding chin quivered—"to love me. An' they's a man, a big man, I wants to cast a spell on."

The truth of it was that Fish had come home three evenings before in fine good humor with the world. Mr. Clinton was in the parlor and Fish had asked him to lend him his pack of ten beagle hounds to hunt rabbits with the next day.

For answer, Mr. Clinton had swung a right hook to Fish's eye, knocking him head foremost into the rubber plant. With luck and speed Fish managed to get a table between them. While Mr. Clinton, with murder in his eye, circled the table in pursuit, Fish gathered from his monosyllables the cause of his anger.

Even Fish had to admit that Mr. Clinton was justified. He remembered vividly that

time when he had come home late, and having lost his key, had climbed in the second story window where Macedonia's nurse was sleeping. It had been natural of Mr. Clinton to suspect him of being the burglar; not so natural for Mr. Clinton to come to the store the next day and apologize.

And now Mr. Clinton had discovered—from a neighbor who had been up that night with a teething baby—that his apology had not been warranted, and that for months his son-in-law must have regarded him with secret mirth.

While Fish circled the parlor table, one jump ahead of eternal life, he kept one prominent eye out for an avenue of escape, the other for Macedonia, his wife. Ever since she and he had come to live with her parents, Macedonia had been the single buffer between him and his parental enemies. At the eleventh lap, with Mr. Clinton still a length and a half behind, Macedonia, her glossy hair high-coiled above her yellow oval face, appeared in the doorway.

When she saw Fish she cried: "Here de man what wished my baby daid!" Then she picked up a vase and smashed it upon his head.

It was time, Fish decided, to leave home. His decision was strengthened by the crash of

another vase as he dashed through the front door. The last words of father and daughter were spoken in unison: "I sees you ag'in an' I cuts yo' heart out!"

The Egyptian from Egypt cleared his throat. "A love charm is ten dollars," he intoned hollowly. "A curse is fifteen dollars." Then he added, rapidly running his words together so they sounded like a promise: "Results-guaranteed-no-money-refunded."

"I ain't got but twenty dollars."

"With you?"

"Yas, suh!"

"Give it to the spirits and I will see what can be done." The man with the turban reached into the darkness and with a quick movement placed a human skull on the table. "Push it through the right eye," he directed, "and say these words: 'Hashem, doem, golem.'"

If any suspicion had lurked in Fish's mind that his adviser was not in league with the spirits of darkness, it was entirely dispelled before his trembling fingers had thrust the four five-dollar bills through the right eye of the late lamented. He was ready to believe that the yellow gentleman could snap his fingers and turn the glare of noonday into night-time

with a moon and stars. He sent up a silent prayer of thanks that the voodoo man was on his side and not on Mr. Clinton's.

The gentleman from Egypt, who was born in Newark, New Jersey, rose and went to a cupboard. "These are love powders," he said when he returned, pushing forward a small bottle containing powdered sugar. "Sprinkle them on candy or food, and who ever eats it will love you forever. And this,"—he pushed forward a little glass bottle full of grape juice —"is dragon's blood. Put this on food or in coffee and whoever swallows it will be cursed by the curse of the Queen of the Seven Stars." Then by way of diversion he added hopefully: "Past, present, and future read for ten dollars."

But Fish had risen, the love powders and dragon's blood gripped tightly in his pocket. Mumbling something about coming back soon, he groped his way out of the house of evil and into the dazzling sunshine of Fenchurch Street. A nervous grin of hope disclosed his white, protruding teeth. There remained but the problem of getting the charmed contents of the bottles into the systems of Macedonia and her parent. If Macedonia would but love him enough they could return to the peaceful domesticity of their own rooms on Queen Street,

leaving Mr. Clinton to cope with the curse of the Queen of the Seven Stars at his leisure. Fish could not dream of anything sweeter.

As Fish shuffled his wide, flat feet over the undulations of Fenchurch Street, hope rose within him, although not so high that he lost the ache in his heart. He and Macedonia had been lovers during their two years of marriage. Never before had she turned against him, and he was not experienced enough to know that a lady, of whatever color, must love a man a great deal before she will break her favorite vase over his head. He did not know that Macedonia's heart felt the same ache as his own; and his whole soul was intent upon so cajoling Fate that his little "yaller fever" would want to gather up her pickaninny and come to live with him alone in their old chambers on Queen Street.

His heart almost stopped beating as he came in sight of Mr. Clinton's white clapboard house. His black shoes—sliced three times longitudinally so as to expose his toes for coolness and comfort—moved more slowly. He pulled his black slouch hat further over his still blacker countenance. The gradual progress of his tall, thin frame, flapped about by a black

suit three sizes too large, resembled the deliberate wavering of a measuring worm.

Presently he was in front of the neat white door. But here he stopped, his breath coming fast. He could no more have lifted the shiny brass knocker than he could have flown. As he stood there he was startled nearly out of his wits by a call: "Fish"

From a near-by window protruded the frizzled, gray head of his next-door neighbor, the lady who, to her sympathetic regret, had given Fish away.

"Ain't nobody home, Fish," she shrilled. "Dey done all gone out."

Fish grinned a weak grin of thanks and, glancing up and down the street, unlocked the front door and entered. He had figured out how he would get the love powders into Macedonia. Hurrying upstairs, he found on her bureau the box of cream-colored chewing taffy he had brought her the day before his expulsion. It was still half full, so taking out the love powders he sprinkled them carefully over it, rubbing them in with his fingers where they fell too thick. This gave the sticks of candy a rather zebra-like appearance, but on the whole he was satisfied with his work.

From the upstairs window he looked once

more to see if the coast was clear, then hastened downstairs to find some means of leaving the dragon's blood for Mr. Clinton. As he passed through the dining room he observed that the table had been extended to its greatest length. It was covered with a white cloth, and places had been set for at least a dozen people.

"When I leaves, dey has a big time!" he muttered bitterly, as he passed on to the pantry. Here there seemed to be great profusion of food. His mouth watered at the sight of a large ham and, in the refrigerator, a turkey. It was some minutes before he thought of a way of providing the dragon's blood for Mr. Clinton exclusively. Then he remembered that on an upper shelf was a bottle of "bitters" out of which Mr. Clinton took about three fingers each evening before dinner "for his stomach."

Fish got down the bottle of bitters and poured the curse into it. Thoughtlessly licking from his thumb and finger some of the dragon's blood that had spilled, he went out the front door and shuffled around to the back of the house for one fond look at the beagle hounds before returning to exile.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE DARKEST HOUR

TO his astonishment, Fish found the gate of the beagle hounds' inclosure swinging wide open. Not a single one of the long-eared, long-tailed, white-and-yellow rabbit hounds was anywhere in sight.

"Macedonia done dat." The gray-haired neighbor appeared suddenly at his elbow. "She come out here to feed dem dawgs, an' she war in sech a swivet 'bout gwine to de horsepital she forgot to close dat gate."

" 'Bout gwine to de wich?" demanded Fish.

"Horsepital, I says."

"What she doin' goin' to a horsepital?" Fish suddenly remembered having licked the dragon's blood from his fingers. Was he to be cursed by an injury to Macedonia? "She ain't sick, is she?" he pleaded.

" 'Tain't her."

"Den who 'tis? What's matter, lady! can't you talk?"

"You ought to know mo' 'bout yo' own chile dan what I does."

"Little Fish? Lady, don't tell me it's Little Fish! What horsepital, lady?"

"'Pears to me lak dey say it was de Childern's Horsepital on Church Street."

Fish Kelly passed by her like a flying crow. For three blocks he ran as fast as his legs would carry him and then, on Church Street, scrambled aboard a trolley. "Lawdy, mistah! Don't stop so much. Sho' do run like a hearse." The ten-minute's ride seemed like an hour, but finally he was standing before the white nurse in charge of the colored children's ward.

"Lady, my baby, my li'l' Fish Kelly, is he much sick, lady?"

"You mean the little Kelly baby brought in about an hour ago?"

"Yassum, lady! Dat's him."

"He isn't sick at all.I understand they were going to have some colored lawyers at their house for dinner to-night, and they thought this would be a convenient time to leave the baby for examination for adenoids."

"You mean he ain't sick, lady?"

"Not a bit."

Fish heaved a sigh of immense relief and in

his tar-black face his protruding white teeth shone in an expansive grin. "Lady, kin I see dat chile my own self?"

The nurse smiled. "Go through that door on the right. He's in the last cot."

Fish shuffled with a light heart down the clean wooden corridor, redolent of carbolic acid, turned into the ward for colored children, and tiptoed along the aisle between the small cots. He saw from afar Little Fish's black potato-shaped head silhouetted against the white pillow, and hastened his steps till he stood, with shining eyes, looking down at him.

Then a shout, a scream from Fish Kelly, Senior, echoed through the quiet building, brought doctors in white suits and nurses in blue-and-white uniforms crowding through the doorway and filling up the narrow aisle.

They found Fish, his face a leaden gray, holding up the sheet that had covered Little Fish, pointing downward with averted eyes. From Little Fish's left wrist a blotch of crimson saturated the sheet and mattress. A young doctor, pushing Fish aside, lifted the tiny black hand.

"Miss Smith—a tourniquet, quick! What do you think of this damned carelessness! Somebody dropped this lancet and the kid

rolled on it. Miss Wilson, get ready for a blood transfusion. We've got to work fast."

Little Fish, his forearm in a tourniquet, was carried out swiftly to the operating room. "We need blood for this baby," said the young, pink-cheeked doctor, turning back to Fish. "Will you give it?"

Fish, his thin face the color of lead, swallowed his prominent Adam's apple three or four times. He knew nothing of the mysterious ways of hospitals and doctors. But he knew that blood is what a man lives by. Little Fish Kelly, his baby, Macedonia's baby, would die unless he was given blood. And somebody had to give it. The person who gave it of course would die. He would like to see Macedonia—just for a moment—first.

"Boss," he asked of the doctor, "kin you wait a whiles? Jes' till I goes home an' comes back?"

"Not a minute," the doctor snapped. "This has got to be done quick if it's going to succeed."

Fish moistened his dry protruding lips with the tip of his tongue. His knees felt trembly.

"All right, boss," he said, and tried to straighten his skinny back. "I'se ready!"

"Follow me," the doctor instructed, and led

the way two doors down the hall to the operating room. Fish, as directed, lay down upon a table next to the table occupied by his son. A nurse put what looked like a gauze-covered coffee strainer over his mouth and nose. A sweet, sickish odor assailed his nostrils. The nurse said—"Breathe deeply—breathe deeply—breathe deeply—breathe deeply—"

"Too bad I got to leave befo' I starts a business for my baby," Fish murmured into the tube. His throat hurt at the thought that he had been unable to see Macedonia to explain how he felt and to say farewell. He hoped she wouldn't blame him—that she would understand he had done the best he could. His ears buzzed and things about him faded away. "Why did I lick dat thumb!" Too bad to leave—too bad to leave the soft summer breezes and patches of yellow sunlight on cool green grass. "Baby— I done my bes'. Baby—good-by!"

Fish opened his eyes and saw the doctor standing over him. "Here he comes!" The doctor's lips moved, but his voice sounded from far away. "Eyes is still good," thought Fish. "Reckon I'se lookin' up from hell." Then he heard his own voice, also from far off, saying: "I wants a drink o' water; I wants a drink o'

water." The nurse lifted his head, and he drank. "Is dis heaben or hell?" he whispered.

"This is earth," grinned the doctor.

Fish looked slowly from one to the other. "When is I gwine die?" he asked.

"You aren't going to die at all," said the doctor heartily. "You'll be walking out of here pronto, as good as ever. And the kid's all right, too."

"You means I ain't gwine to die?"

"Why, no! Did you think it would kill you to give your blood to the kid?"

Fish nodded weakly.

The doctor looked at the nurse and the nurse looked at the doctor. They were not smiling. The doctor cleared his throat.

"Why did you agree to give your blood if you thought it would kill you?"

Fish rolled his eyes in languid resentment.

"He my baby, ain't he?"

"Well," exclaimed the doctor, "you are certainly a white nigger!"

"If I'se white, 'pearances sho' am deceivin'," grinned Fish. "Mr. Doctor, when does I leave here?"

"Right now, if you feel equal to it."

Fish swung his feet down and sat dizzily on the edge of the table. "Lady what held my

nose sho' did make me sleep tight. Ain't woke up yit." He slid gingerly to the floor. "Boy, howdy! Us gwine live, after all. Feet, can you walk?"

Feet could. Feet did. Feet took Fish back along the clean corridor and out into the warm sunshine. "Feet is prime; head not so good." A razor of pain cut through his forehead. He felt a sick qualm at the pit of his stomach. "Boy, for why you lick dat thumb! Boy, you brings bad luck wharever you goes." He shuffled along disconsolately. A tide of gloom and forebodings rose gradually over his spirits.

"Boy, if you love yo' li'l' high yaller, you better go 'way an' leave her. Dat's best."

Before he had shuffled two more blocks, his mind was made up. It was nearly six o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Clinton would be home, the family would be assembled. He, Fish Kelly, would walk in upon them and say good-by. He held no animosity. He would tell Mr. Clinton not to drink the bitters. He would go away, go to England, or maybe Raleigh, North Ca'lina. His eyes moistened as he lingered over that scene—the gathered family, who had so mistreated him, stricken to silence as with a kind heart he turned and walked

away. Then he would go to France, or possibly jump a freight for New Orleans.

Feet led him up Church Street into the suburb of Huntersville and presently within sight of the white clapboard house. The long French windows between the dining room and the side porch were open. Fish slanted a look at the sun and decided the family must be nearly ready for dinner. But he did not crave their food. He was not even afraid to confront them. He was so filled with the sentiment of renunciation, and with kindness, he feared no one. He came to give, not to receive.

He went up to the neat white door and knocked boldly. Shutters next door flew open with a bang and a gray, kinky head protruded. "Macedonia an' her ma done gone a-runnin' to de horsepital half hour ago, Fish. Dat baby o' yourn done cut hisself. Sho' was scairt. Jes' drapped ever-thing an' run. I been lookin' for Mr. Clinton, to tell him when he come."

Fish nodded, blinked his eyes, and let himself in at the front door. He would wait. As he walked through the small square entrance hall he thought he heard strange sounds. On the threshold of the dining room he stopped aghast.

Silhoutted against the open French windows the figure of a yellow-and-white dog stood with feet wide apart upon the dining-room table, teeth buried in the creamy oblong juciness of a Smithfield ham. From all over the room there came the muffled clamor of snuffing, damp noses, of feet slipping on plates, of wagging tails striking against chair rungs. Fish saw a yellow-and-white body on the other end of the table, tearing white meat from the breast of a huge cold turkey, the legs of which were being drawn in opposite directions by two lop-eared beagle hounds. It was too late to do anything. The darky's delight, a cold dinner, had been ruined. On the once immaculate tablecloth, cheese and olive sandwiches had been turned over and trampled up with a succulent mess of cold greens and boiled pork. Pickles skidded from beneath tugging paws and collided with rolling roasting ears of corn. Mr. Clinton had ten beagle hounds. He kept them lean and hungry for speed.

Fish yelled and kicked at those nearest, but they merely ran to the other side of the table. He knocked the three off his end of the table, but they took the turkey with them. It landed with an unpleasant *plump* upon the carpet. He gave up.

"Ain't no use fightin' against dragon's blood."

He felt weak after the exertion. On the sideboard was a decanter of blackberry wine. He filled a glass and sipped it with appreciation. The dogs ate ravenously. To an impartial observer, seeing the wreck of what had been meant for a beautiful feast, Fish might have seemed a lean, dark, sinister spirit from another world, gloating between draughts of wine while his dumb imps completed his fiendish plans.

At this moment Mr. Clinton, followed by ten colored members of the bar, came in the front door.

Fish faced Mr. Clinton with a feeling of kindness and pity. His speech was prepared. He set down the glass of wine and wiped his protruding lips.

"Mr. Clinton," he said, while that burly gentleman, radiant in a frock coat and a speaking checked vest, stood with his colleagues and gazed upon the scene of ruin with the sudden paralysis of surprise, "Mr. Clinton, I have called upon you for de las' time, to say goodby. You treated me bad, but I forgives."

Mr. Clinton came nearer. His mouth hung open and his eyes, behind their horn-rimmed

spectacles, popped out in his yellow face. Fish, in his weakened condition, had been quickly susceptible to the fumes of the wine. He was going to let bygones be bygones. Before a large and distinguished audience, he would forgive his father-in-law, and say farewell. It did not occur to him that in the sight of Mr. Clinton he was as a red flag to a bull. He did not realize that Mr. Clinton would immediately remember his earlier request for the loan of the beagle hounds, the blow that followed, and look upon the present havoc as a deliberate attempt at revenge. Instead, Fish held out a long, black hand.

"Mr. Clinton, I forgives you and says good-by. I's goin' 'way for good—to France or maybe Raleigh."

Fish had hardly completed his sentence before he realized that Mr. Clinton's entire right side, preceded by Mr. Clinton's fist, was approaching him with great velocity. He saw suddenly a beautiful circle of stars, some red, some green, some yellow. The house shook and the floor struck him on the back of the head. "Lady," he muttered inaudibly, "leggo my nose." Then somebody blew the sun out.

When Fish opened his eyes again he thought

he was in heaven. Everything he saw seemed to verify this impression. The ceiling was the ceiling of the beloved room on Queen Street where he and Macedonia had started their career together. The wall paper of large red roses belonged to the ceiling. In the corner was the old sewing machine, and on the mantel the heart-shaped alarm clock that looked like gold. On the floor was the same new red carpet. But there was something else, a presence, that made it seem real. He painfully turned his head.

Yes, it must be heaven. There by the window, in her neat brown dress, her glossy hair as usual coiled above her oval light-brown face, Macedonia leaned over a glass on the table into which she was pouring a yellow liquid from a bottle.

She turned at the sound of movement, came to him, knelt and slipped her arm under his head.

"My man!"

"Baby, say dem words once mo'!"

"My man. My hero man. Does he give his blood to my chile? Does he git hurted 'cause I leaves dem dawgs git out? Does ever'body, even his baby, treat him bad?"

"Whose baby is talkin'?"

"Yo' baby. Yo' baby done brung yo' back whar us belongs. Here whar us gwine stay so nobody can't part us."

Fish sighed deeply and closed his popped eyes. A beatific smile made his white teeth shine in his ebony face. "Dat owl-cat man, he sho' am a good frien'."

"What you sayin', honey?"

"Baby, I ain't sayin' nothin'. I ain't got time to say nothin'. I'se too busy bein' happy."

Macedonia kissed him. "Poppa say he through wid us for good. But I don't care."

"Me neither," Fish agreed. But he doubted that Mr. Clinton was through with him.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE MYSTERY OF THE HOUSE OF CLINTON

A MONTH went by in a state of armed truce, the relations between the Clintons and the Kellys being of a distant and formal nature. But an interview that then took place in Mr. Clinton's office proved that Fish was right in believing that Mr. Clinton was not through with him.

"Sit down!" roared Mr. Clinton as Lawyer entered.

Lawyer Little's valor was nine parts discretion. He did not take time even to flick up the long tails of his once black but now greenish coat, but subsided so suddenly into the near-mahogany chair beside Mr. Clinton's near-mahogany desk, that his greasy old opera hat fell from his plump, bacon-colored hand and rolled over by the china cuspidor.

Mr. Clinton's gray-clad bulk was silhouetted against a cherry bookcase half filled with law books bound in tan leather. He remained standing, and glared down at Lawyer through

his horn-rimmed spectacles, his close-cropped gray mustache a fierce straight line across his square "high-yellow" countenance.

"You knows," he thundered, "dat it ain't right for me to talk a pussonal an' confidential matter to a man wid a reputation like yourn."

"Sho' ain't, Mr. Clinton," agreed Lawyer ingratiatingly. He had felt uneasy ever since he had been summoned to Mr. Clinton's presence—for one reason, because Mr. Clinton's office was in such uncomfortable proximity to the city jail. "I ain't had de honor of seein' you, suh, since you stop bein' deputy assistant to de assistant prosecutin' attorney."

"Dat's right," said Mr. Clinton grimly, "an' sink it into your haid dat I'm liable to be assistant to de prosecutor again."

"It done sunk 'fore you spoke, Mr. Clinton."

"Now another thing: they ain't no witnesses to dis here conversation."

"I ain't seen none, suh." Lawyer turned his spherical body in a sudden inspection of the two closed doors leading to the corridor, and glanced at the green baize screen standing in the corner.

"Therefore, if you say I said anything, I can deny it, and sue you for criminal libel."

"You sho' is cute, I'll remark dat," commented Lawyer in sincere admiration.

Mr. Clinton twirled the heavy yellow chain that hung across the gray vest of his impressive abdomen. His expression became mollified. He seated himself in the swivel chair and swung his large tan shoes up on the desk.

"I reckon you knows dat skinny, good-for-nothin' son-in-law of mine what is name' Fish Kelly?"

"Um," grunted Lawyer in a sympathetic tone that conveyed no hint of esteem.

"Well," snapped the father-in-law, in a sudden burst of bitterness, "I gwine git rid of him. You understan' dat?"

Even Lawyer Little, whose life had been given over to misdemeanors that sometimes had skirted the edge of felony, gasped slightly.

"Yeah?" he inquired with a rising inflection. "I s'pose you means," he added with the suavity of one who is endeavoring to be congenial, "dat you want me to help you kill him."

Mr. Clinton's feet dropped to the floor and he banged on the desk with his fist.

"You fat idjit," he shouted in his thunderous voice, "does I look like a murderer?"

"Why, Mr. Clinton," protested Lawyer, in-

stantly, in pained surprise. "How kin you ast me sich a question? Can't you tell when a man's jokin'?"

Mr. Clinton glared for a moment at Lawyer's round shining countenance, then put his feet back on the desk. Lawyer, now that he had weathered the squall, whipped out a red bandanna handkerchief and mopped his bullet-shaped cranium, the sparse black wool of which had recently been clipped at the expense of the city. He realized that he had not risen in Mr. Clinton's esteem by this disclosure of the extent to which he was willing to be accommodating. He squirmed in his chair, and dabbed at the three chins that billowed out over his collar.

"What I mean is dis," explained Fish's father-in-law. "Dat black skinny nigger been a thorn in my foot ever since I first seen him. He got my girl to marry him, an' she could have had the highest-livingest colored man in town. Den dey had a baby," Mr. Clinton continued bitterly, "what was black as he is. My own gran'child! Den dat nigger don't make enough to keep a millionaire out of de poor-house. I all de time got to be a-contributin' and a-contributin'." Mr. Clinton looked worried. "An' jes' now I got unusual expenses."

He glanced quickly at Lawyer as if he had made a slip by referring to the thing that worried him. But Lawyer was merely bland attention. "He won't never do nothin' all his life 'cept push a cart for Greenberg's delicatessen," Mr. Clinton ended.

"Ain't it de trufe!" sang Lawyer virtuously, although his own acquaintance with labor was limited to the times he had repaired the county roads, by request.

"And now I's sick of it," concluded Mr. Clinton. "I gwine kick him out of dis town, den I gwine git my daughter a divorce, and give her a new start in life. Dat's what I gwine do."

"An' you is *right.*" Lawyer had never forgiven Fish for ceasing to coöperate with him in questionable financial schemes and settling down, two years ago, to a quiet married life. He felt the jealousy that unsuccessful crime always feels for successful virtue. The idea of visiting irretrievable disaster upon the gentle Fish was music to his ears. "Do Miss Macedonia, his wife, feel de same way you do?"

"Co'se she don't. You ever know a woman what had any common sense when it come to her husband? But after I gits things fixed she gwine look at it my way. Ain't gwine be no other way to look at it."

"Sho' am glad you is after Fish Kelly, an' not me," remarked Lawyer flatteringly. "What way can I 'sist you, suh?"

Mr. Clinton went to the door, and peered into the corridor.

"We got to keep dis thing confidential," he said when he returned. "An' do it quiet." He looked nervously behind the green baize screen. "If we is caught doin' dis, you git five years at de littlest."

"Five years!" exclaimed Lawyer. "How much does you git?"

"I ain't gwine git caught," replied Mr. Clinton.

Lawyer swallowed. His light-brown countenance took on a greenish tinge.

"Did you say five years?" he inquired gently.

"For conspiracy, yes," answered Mr. Clinton abstractedly. He was pacing up and down the room, pulling at his mustache, wondering if it was safe, after all, to enlist Lawyer as a partner.

Lawyer glanced at the door.

"If it's all de same to you, Mr. Clinton," he began, "I sho' would like to finish dis here talk to-morrow." He rose and picked up his hat. "I promised I'd meet a man . . ."

"Sit down!" roared Mr. Clinton for the second time.

Lawyer sat down so suddenly that his chair cracked.

"Dis is de plan," snapped Mr. Clinton, having decided that he was forced to take a chance. He couldn't do the dirty work himself, and Lawyer was the only person he knew who combined the willingness to help him with the wit to carry it through. "You see Fish Kelly an' gits him to come here to dis office. I gwine let him see dat dere's a thousan'-dollar bond in de drawer of this here desk. Before he gits here, you git here first and hide behin' dat screen. When he come in I gwine unlock dat drawer an' let him see de bond, an' den slip outside an' leave him a chance."

Lawyer chuckled. "What I mean—dat's slick!"

Mr. Clinton became enthusiastic.

"He takes it. I lets him walk out wid it; den I git Officer Johnson an' ketches him on de street an' brings him back."

"An' den," Lawyer added, "we sends him up de James River a-bustin' rocks for de Gover'-mint."

"No," said the father-in-law, "dat's where

you shows you don't know nothin'. If I was to send him to de pen for stealin', Macedonia would know I done it for meanness an' she'd stick by him. Dat's a woman. A woman don't care what a man do—" Lawyer was interested to catch a hint of reminiscence in the words of this pillar of Huntersville society. "Jes' so he don't do nothin' 'gainst *her*."

"Dat's right," agreed Lawyer. "I mought a-known you was figgerin' on sump'n' deep."

"Dat's de way I always figgers," admitted this bulwark of respectability. "What I does den is tell Fish I gwine let him off easy. Let him skip town an' stay 'way for good. If he ever come back I gwine send him to jail for life."

"Now you talkin'!" cried Lawyer, and slapped his fat knee. "Could you sen' him up long for dat?" he inquired seriously.

"So long he'd forgit whar he was born an' raised."

"An' den what?" asked Lawyer.

"An' den—" Mr. Clinton smiled a chilling smile. "You lets Macedonia know what woman he run away wid."

Lawyer fairly gasped in admiration. "I'll say you is deep!" he exulted. "Dat's one thing sho' do make a woman mad."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Clinton. The same shadow of worry passed suddenly over his square yellow face. "Yes," he repeated slowly, "it sho' would. I mean, it sho' do." He looked again at Lawyer after this verbal slip; but Lawyer was patting his fat leg and chuckling till the lone button on his greenish coat hopped up and down.

"You can 'range to have dat black nigger here at fo' o'clock dis evenin'?" inquired the Master Mind.

"All cocked an' primed," assured Lawyer, rising cheerfully and putting on his hat, "ready to be shot to glory."

> Eve'y time I comes to town
> De boys start kickin' my dog aroun'.
> Makes no diff'ence ef he is a houn',
> Dey gotta stop kickin' my dog aroun'.

These words, at about the time of the foregoing conference, wound from the thin countenance of Fish Kelly. The business that Mr. Clinton, in one of his rare fits of good humor, had promised to buy for his grandchild, of course had never materialized, and Fish had been forced to return to the propulsion of a pushcart for Mr. Greenberg's delicatessen.

At the moment he would have said that he

was singing, but the song was really a series of painful and melancholy moans, symptomatic of the depression of his spirit.

Fish's aged black suit hung listlessly upon his tall thin frame; the dusky gleam of a bare toe showed as mute witness to poverty through a slit in one of his disconsolate tan oxfords, and his ebon countenance, prominent of tooth and eye, glistened sweatily as though it had just emerged from an ink bottle. He rested the front of his pushcart against the curb, dropped a brick in it to hold it down, and shambled toward the store entrance.

> Eve'y time I comes to town,
> De boys start kickin' . . .

Fish stopped. On the corner stood a spindling youth who was quite the queerest person he had ever seen. The youth's natural color was what might be called a "high yaller," but in a circular area about his mouth, and in places on his forehead, the skin apparently had peeled away, and here his complexion was as white as any man's. Fish had heard—as who in Huntersville has not?—that there are lotions which will make the hair straight and the skin white, and it seemed that here was an ocular demonstration. He sidled nearer. His

own skin was so black that his protruding eyes and teeth seemed startlingly white by contrast, and the thought that this darkness might somehow be relieved had a corresponding effect upon the gloom of his spirits.

"Sho' is warm, ain't it?" Fish inquired.

"Sho' is," agreed the youth who was turning white. He was quite a gentleman of fashion, with a new maroon-colored suit, a pearl fedora with a green band, and shiny yellow shoes stylishly lumpy at the tips. Observing Fish's interest in his appearance, he nonchalantly shot out his wrist and examined a goldish watch.

"Um!" Fish was unable to repress a moan of admiration. "Some watch!"

"Jes' bought it dis mornin'," grinned the youth, who seemed pleased to find some one with whom to share his enjoyment. "How you like dis suit an' hat?"

"Sho' am noble."

"Jes' bought dem, too. How you like dese shoes?"

Fish was momentarily diverted from his interest in turning white.

"How you make all dis money?"

The youth smiled covertly.

"Mo' dan one way of makin' money. Don't always have to work for it."

"What's dat other way?" asked Fish eagerly.

"Can't everybody do it," answered the youth, smiling as if at some secret. "First place, you got to be born right."

"Born right?" Fish was nonplussed. "What your name, colored boy?"

The boy snickered. "Don't tell my name in dis city. Dat's what I got de money for. Can't tell my name 'cept when I's home. Den everybody know it."

"What place is dat?"

"Newbern. Ever been to Newbern?"

"Naw," said Fish. "But my wife's father, he used to travel down dat way, long time back. He a big lawyer here. His name Clinton."

The youth started. "Does you know him?" he asked in alarm. "Don't tell him I said nothin' to you. Please don't!"

"You ain't said nothin'. What you talkin' 'bout?"

"I promised to leave town dis mornin'," said the boy nervously. "If he know I still here—"

There was a rattle and grinding behind them, the squeaking of a brake, and an instant

later the gray-clad bulk of Mr. Clinton towered above them. He said nothing as he looked from Fish to the spotted youth and back again, but his expression was not a pretty thing to see. The youth began to tremble.

Fish assimilated some of the boy's fear and was on the point of silently stealing away when Mr. Clinton anticipated him.

"What you doin' talkin' to dis boy?" he demanded, his straight gray mustache twisting into a murderous snarl. "Answer me!" Behind his spectacles his eyes had become bloodshot with rage. Fish fell back and raised an arm.

"Ain't doin' nothin'," he began with a dry throat. But the powerful Mr. Clinton with a quick movement caught him by the coat and whirled him with a sickening impact against a wooden telegraph pole, jerked him from his knees, to which he had fallen, and kicked him viciously once, and again, and again—until Fish with the strength of agony broke away and dashed into the open side doorway of the delicatessen.

In the rear of the store, finding himself unpursued, Fish limped to a window and, while rubbing himself, looked out.

Mr. Clinton had returned to the spotted

youth, who had remained transfixed and trembling.

"Didn't I tell you to ketch dat nine o'clock train?" the lawyer demanded through shut teeth. "You go on to de station right now while I follows you."

The boy hurried off in the direction of the railroad station and Mr. Clinton, after stalling his engine twice, followed slowly in his tiny Rolls-Rough coupé.

Fish Kelly sat down cautiously upon a case of canned goods and gave himself over to bitterness. This, certainly, was the last straw. For years he had lived in a state of subjection based upon fear. First, when he was unmarried, Lawyer Little had forced him week after week to be the cat's-paw in risky ventures, and he had been afraid to refuse. After his marriage to Macedonia, daughter of the prominent and influential Mr. Clinton, Lawyer had feared to bother him, but the scepter had passed to his father-in-law. Fish's nature was of the gentlest. He was eager to meet friendliness with gratitude and requite kindness with affection. Through no fault of his own, Mr. Clinton had chosen consistently to make him the butt of sarcasm and ridicule, to which he had submitted because a melancholy sense of in-

feriority suggested that perhaps the affronts were deserved. But this latest offense was different. Absolutely without rhyme or reason, Mr. Clinton had attacked him savagely and had kicked him off the street as though he had been a dog.

Fish felt a hardening within, as though his soul were turning to iron. The most yielding of natures, once thoroughly aroused, become sometimes the most adamant, seeming to rally all at once the unused forces of resolution. As if an outside strength had come to assist him, Fish felt that he was done with being abused. He stood up, took a deep breath, and thumped himself upon his narrow chest. As he loaded his cart with baskets of canned goods and vegetables, in preparation for the next delivery, the pains in his legs served but to remind him of a new-found emancipation. With more cheerfulness and in louder volume his quavery tenor rang out:

> Makes no diff'ence if he is a houn'
> Dey gotta stop kickin' my——

He was interrupted by a familiar voice and looked up from the arrangement of a basket to see the globular greenish figure of Lawyer Little, whose shining light-brown counte-

nance, beneath a dusty opera hat, was lightened by a specious smile of friendship.

"Hello dar, black boy! Been lookin' for you."

"What you want?" Fish pouted his long lips and opened and shut his prominent eyes. He had promised Macedonia to keep away from Lawyer Little. And he had kept his promise—scrupulously—largely because when in proximity to Lawyer he was overpowered by that gentleman's personality and unable to stay out of trouble. But just at this moment he felt that he could brave Lawyer's influence without fear.

"Wants somebody to split some money wid me. Dat's all." Lawyer grinned fatly. "I s'pose you got mo' money dan you need."

Fish took off his black felt hat and scratched the undulations of his kinky head.

"Wouldn't say dat," he answered. His prominent teeth showed whitely in a smile. "But I got all de trouble I needs."

"I ain't said nothin' 'bout no trouble, is I?"

"Ol' Lady Trouble speak over yo' shoulder."

"Lissen," said Lawyer. "Come wid me an' I gwine show you how you can git dat business you been talkin' 'bout."

Fish felt a jump in his heart. A little busi-

ness would make him independent. Then he could match Mr. Clinton, sneer for sneer. After Mr. Clinton's false promises, it would be heavenly to succeed without his help.

"Whar you want to go?" asked Fish.

"Jes' up to de Palm Palace, whar we can talk."

Lawyer waddled hastily in advance to conceal his smile of triumph. Fish shuffled with him along the brick paved, sunny street. At the next corner they entered the Palm Palace, passed through the soda-dispensing part and into the back room where stood three pool tables and, in a corner, a green-covered table upon which, the police claimed, sometimes dice were rolled. Lawyer led the way to seats by a table in a dark and unfrequented nook. Fish, concealing his defiance of Lawyer, Mr. Clinton and a hostile universe, folded his long limbs into a chair.

"Fish," said Lawyer, "dat pa-in-law of yourn promised to buy a business for you to run an' build up for Little Fish. Didn't he?"

Fish's eyes blinked sullenly. "Dat's what he promise. Dat ain't what he done."

"I know it ain't. An' dat sho' do make me mad. A frien' of mine is a frien' of mine."

Fish maintained a heavy and suspicious silence.

"A frien' of mine is a frien' of mine," Lawyer repeated, "an' it sho' did make me mad when I come by de Liberty Lunch Room dis mornin' an' seen it was for sale. 'Mr. Clinton should oughter buy dat for Fish,' I says to myself, 'like he promise,' I says."

Fish muttered a bitter assent.

"I happen to meet Mr. Clinton 'bout dat time," Lawyer continued, "an' I done mention dis to him. He took me in his office an' talked 'bout you sump'n' scandalous. I says to him, I says, 'Fish Kelly is a frien' of mine; an' a frien' of mine,' I says, 'is a frien' of mine.' An' I puts on my hat an' walks out."

Fish believed all of this except Lawyer's defiance of Mr. Clinton. His bitterness rose.

"If dat man was a honest man," said Lawyer with feeling, "he sho' would buy you dat place."

"Um," agreed the son-in-law.

"I ain't got no interest in dis," said Lawyer. "'Cept to advise you like a frien'. You know what I'd do if I was you? I'd go up to Mr. Clinton's office at fo' o'clock dis evenin'. He said he'd be dar den. An' I would deman' of him to keep his promise. Can't do you no

harm. An' if you reminds him of it real strong, and tells him it's a good payin' business, like as not he'd do like he say."

"Dat's easy said."

"You know why it ain't easy for you? 'Cause you scared of dat man."

Fish made an inarticulate sound of dissent.

"Yes you is! An' dey ain't no sense in it. You scared of him jes' 'cause you is. If he was scared of you, den you'd be boss. Jes' like de old sayin', you look a wild animal in de eye an' he turn away."

"I tried dat on a dog once," objected Fish, "an' he run me from hell on through."

"Dat's 'cause he warn't a wild animal," explained Lawyer patly. "He war a domestic animal. But I tell you what I means. Ain't you never seen a big young rooster what is scared of a little old rooster, jes' 'cause he was raise up wid him?"

"Sho' is."

"An' ain't you never shook dis old rooster up in a flour bag, so de young rooster don't know him, an' den see de young rooster beat de face off'n him?"

"Dat's right."

"Dat's de way wid you an' Mr. Clinton," Lawyer repeated profoundly. "You is de

young rooster an' he is de old one. You jes' scared of him 'cause you is, dat's all. Ain't no sense in it. If he was scared of you, you'd be boss."

Fish felt suddenly that this was true. It comported exactly with the strength that had come to him after Mr. Clinton's unwarranted violence. He rose, struck the table with his palm and thrust his black face near Lawyer's.

"I ain't gwine be under hack to nobody no mo'," he announced. "I gwine up to see dat man at fo' o'clock an' tell him what I think."

Lawyer drew back.

"You got a look in yo' eye like a lion!" he said. So startled was he at this metamorphosis that Fish was shuffling out of the room before he had recovered sufficiently to speak.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### SETTIN' PRETTY

FISH, his jaw set tight, returned to his pushcart, leaned against it and pursued his round of deliveries. On Queen Street, before his door, he spied Little Fish, clad in blue rompers from which his skinny bowed legs ran down, like sticks of licorice, to bare feet that were characteristically long and flat. His undulatory head was potato-shaped and coal black, and when his white eyeballs rolled at Fish in recognition, the father's eyes moistened with joy.

Macedonia, in a trim red-and-white calico dress, came out of the street door and hailed him.

"What for you lookin' so serious?" Her oval light-brown face was anxious.

"I done decide sump'n'. Dat's all."

"Don't you go git in no trouble." She gave her glossy hair a pat.

"I gwine have a surprise for you," said Fish grimly, " 'fo' dis day is over."

"Fish Kelly," she exclaimed, her brown eyes large, "you ain't been schemin' roun' again wid dat Lawyer Little, is you?"

"Ain't been schemin' roun' wid nobody," retorted Fish. "You wait. My li'l' baby gwine see if his pa can't do mo' dan push a cart."

He leaned once more against the handle of the pushcart, while Macedonia followed the progress of his tall thin frame with thoughtful eyes.

"Meet me at de Liberty Lunch Room," he turned and shouted, " 'bout fo' o'clock."

Then he went on his way. At four o'clock he parked his empty cart before the side entrance of the delicatessen, and shuffled lugubriously up the street toward Mr. Clinton's law office. Ordinarily he would have been gray with fear at the thought of bearding this burly yellow gentleman, but to-day, as by some miracle, the iron had entered his soul. Lawyer's encouragement had been all that he required to convince him that he need no longer be a coward. He wasn't going to take any violence from Mr. Clinton. He reached in his pocket and closed his fingers round a large clasp knife. With this as a further moral support he mounted the rickety wooden stairs to Mr. Clinton's office.

Mr. Clinton was seated at his near-mahogany desk, and in the corner behind him, making a sort of inclosure against the wall, was a large green baize screen. He appeared to be looking for something in the desk's middle drawer, found it, unfolded the crisp green paper of a thousand-dollar railway bond, folded it again and dropped it into the drawer, which he partly closed. Then he glanced up and seemed to be surprised to see Fish Kelly.

"Mister Clinton," Fish began firmly—

"Jes' a minute," interrupted Mr. Clinton, "I mus' step out an' see a man." He got up and hurried into the corridor, closing the door behind him.

Fish sat down and waited, rehearsing in his mind the peremptory words that he was going to address to his father-in-law. His imagination had been fired by Lawyer's encouragement, and he decided while he waited that his attitude would be militant. He would shout at Mr. Clinton as if he himself were a person to be feared, and then—had not Lawyer said it?—fear would enter Mr. Clinton's heart and Mr. Kelly, instead of Mr. Clinton, would be boss.

The minutes passed, however, and Mr. Clinton did not return. There was a somehow

familiar odor in the room, and Fish, although he could not explain it, had an uncomfortable feeling that he was not alone. He remembered that Macedonia was to meet him at the Liberty Lunch Room at four o'clock, and as it was now after that hour, and as Mr. Clinton gave no sign of ever returning, Fish got up and shuffled out into the street, determining that the interview—which was to be so unfortunate for Mr. Clinton—had merely been postponed.

His flat-footed shuffle had borne him no further than the next corner when he heard rapid footsteps behind him, and the next moment a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

Fish was startled when he turned and discovered that the heavy hand proceeded from the blue sleeve of Police Officer Johnson. His conscience was clear, however, and his momentary panic changed to anger when he saw that the colored policeman was accompanied by Mr. Clinton.

"What you all want?" he demanded belligerently.

"You," said Officer Johnson briefly.

"For what?"

"For takin' dat bon' out of my desk. Dat's what," snapped Mr. Clinton.

"What you talkin' 'bout, man?"

"I'll show you!" Mr. Clinton roughly jerked open Fish's coat and thrust his hand into the inside pocket. Not finding the bond there, he tried Fish's other pockets, and ran his hand everywhere that he thought it might be concealed.

"Why, you ain't got it!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Naw, I ain't got it," cried Fish, wrought up by this latest injustice. "But I got you! I come to yo' office lookin' for you." Fish remembered Lawyer's advice and began to shout. "You's a fine sort of man to be a lawyer, ain't you?" He thrust his black face close to Mr. Clinton's. "You's a fine man to be gran'pappy to my Little Fish!"

Mr. Clinton fell back a step. His face paled. He had been wondering how much the white-spotted yellow youth had said to Fish. Now his worst dread seemed confirmed.

Fish followed him, carried onward by success. "You's a fine man, ain't you?" he shouted, repeating the words that had been so effective.

"Wait—wait, Fish!" Mr. Clinton pleaded. "We don't want talk 'bout dis in company."

"I don't want talk 'bout nothin'," replied Fish in a loud voice. "All I want is you to

come on wid me to de Liberty Lunch Room, which you is gwine buy dis very day for yo' li'l' gran'chile, like you promised."

"All right. I'll go wid you," agreed Mr. Clinton hurriedly. He would have done anything rather than have Fish blurt out in public what the spotted youth might have told him. For Mr. Clinton, with all his other faults, was really here the victim of his own tenderheartedness. Years ago, when he had been called occasionally to Newbern on business, he had engaged in a love affair with a young "high-brown" lady of that vicinity. After a while this lady informed him that he was to be the father of her child. He had represented himself in Newbern as a single man; and he knew that if any hint of this thing drifted back to his own city it would topple his cherished reputation for respectability, and, what was more serious, disrupt his domestic peace. Mrs. Clinton was a lady to be respected for reasons that she was always willing to make plain. So, foolishly and impulsively, to save public scandal, he had married the girl, thus committing the crime of bigamy and entering upon a career of pain. For of course the high-brown lady had eventually discovered his duplicity; and whenever she felt herself in need of funds

she so advised Mr. Clinton, wording the notice so that it was less of a request than a demand.

Upon looking back, Mr. Clinton remembered that the lady had whispered the news to him in the moonlight when they were both looking down from a high bridge to the water below. The thought had occurred to him then that it would be a good idea to pitch her over. But she had seemed so pretty in the moonlight his tender heart restrained him.

Mr. Clinton had solemnly sworn, many times since, never to be tender-hearted again.

As he walked along with Fish, Mr. Clinton concluded that his son-in-law was taking advantage of the situation to blackmail him into keeping his promise. He decided that if he had to buy the restaurant, he would buy it in his own name—Fish could neither read nor write and wouldn't know the difference. Then, when the time was propitious, he would pitch Fish over. In fact, if he got hold of Lawyer right away, it wasn't too late to work out the bond plot to a satisfactory conclusion.

They arrived at the Liberty Lunch Room, and after inspecting its double row of oilcloth-covered tables, visiting the kitchen, where the cook was juggling flapjacks, and examining the store of goods, Mr. Clinton agreed that the

place was worth a thousand dollars. He told the proprietor that he would come the next day and conclude the transaction.

"Naw, you won't," interrupted Fish. Macedonia had arrived, and he was pining to display his new-found power over mankind. "You be back here wid de money whilst we waits for you, dat's what you gwine do."

"Why, sure, Fish," Mr. Clinton acceded, with a ghastly smile. He was helpless, and before his own daughter. He left them and walked back to his office, racking his brain for some means of getting Fish out of the way. The immediate thing was to get the bond from his desk and take it over to the bank—which was open until eight o'clock—and put it in his safe-deposit box. After that he would buy the restaurant in his own name, and return to the office for another conference with Lawyer.

He mounted the rickety steps, entered the office and opened the drawer of his desk. The bond was gone. He rushed over to the screen and jerked it aside. Lawyer Little was gone, too.

Fish and Macedonia sat at a table by the restaurant window and awaited Mr. Clinton's return.

"How come you talk to him like dat?" inquired the wondering Macedonia. "How come he take it?"

"How come it?" Fish tilted his egg-shaped cranium upward. He put a thumb in his vest and looked down at Macedonia sideways. Against his black skin his prominent white teeth glittered. "'Cause I skeered him."

"You skeered him?" cried the wife. "You ain't never skeered nobody in yo' life!"

"Dat's right," Fish agreed. "Dey always been skeerin' me. But from now on I gwine skeer dem first."

"What kind o' fool talk is dis?"

"Dis ain't no fool talk, 'ooman. Ain't you seen yo' own pappy hawin' when I say 'Haw' an' geein' when I say 'Gee'?"

"Yeah. But dat man like a mule, too. He haw for a while, den he lif' his hin' leg."

"He ain't gwine let nothin' fly at me. Dar's Lawyer Little 'cross de street. You watch me skeer him, too."

"Fish, you better leave dat fat nigger be. You rarin' for a fall!"

But Fish, confident in the new method he had found for triumphing over humanity, had passed into the street.

"Lawyer Little," he shouted peremptorily, "come here!"

Lawyer started, looked hastily up and down the street, then waddled over to where Fish was standing. He peered uneasily into the restaurant and then asked:

"What you want, Fish?"

"I wants you," Fish said loudly, glaring at the fat man, who paled visibly.

"Me?" inquired Lawyer. He removed his greasy opera hat and passed a plump brown hand nervously over his clipped skull. "What you want wid me, Mr. Kelly?"

"Mr. Clinton gwine buy dis lunch room for me," Fish snapped, thrusting his face into Lawyer's, "an' I wants you to come here in de mornin' and sweep de place out."

Lawyer's eyes opened and his jaw dropped. "He gwine buy dis place for *you*?" he asked, as if he was hearing unwelcome news.

"You heerd me. An' after you sweeps it out I wants you to wash de dishes an' wait on de tables. You git dat?"

"Certainly, Mr. Kelly," said Lawyer in a weak voice. Fish had attacked him at the psychological moment. After he had removed the bond from Mr. Clinton's desk, Lawyer had gone in succession to three banks in an

endeavor to sell it. At each place they had unhesitatingly refused to deal with him and had viewed him with such suspicion that he was rapidly becoming a nervous wreck from the mere fact of having the valuable but useless document in his possession. Every time it crackled in his pocket he heard the judge say: "Five years!"

In desperation, Lawyer had thought of returning to Mr. Clinton, giving him back the bond, and receiving forgiveness on condition that he make the plot against Fish successful. But now he was like a rat in a trap. It was evident, if Mr. Clinton was buying the restaurant, that Clinton and Fish had come together again—no doubt in order to inflict a double revenge upon himself.

"Lissen," said Lawyer, speaking in a confidential tone and coming nearer. "Is you an' me frien's?"

"I ain't a frien' of nobody," Fish roared.

"An' you is right," said Lawyer, always sailing with the wind. "But *you* is a frien' of *mine*. An' a frien' of mine is a frien' of mine." Lawyer stepped closer and opened his coat. "You is a frien' of mine," he explained, "an' I done brung you a present." He handed Fish the thousand-dollar bond.

"What's dis?" asked Fish.

"Dat's from me, jes' 'cause you give me a job," explained Lawyer, moving away now that the dreadful piece of paper was safely out of his hands. "It's a gif' from me to you."

"What good is it?"

"Take it to de bank," said Lawyer, "an' dey'll give you a thousan' dollars for it."

"Sho' nuff?"

"Sho' dey will. An' after you gits de money you don't have to give me none of it 'less you's a mind to."

Lawyer looked over Fish's shoulder, and with an agility surprising in one so fat, darted up the lane next to the restaurant. Fish turned to see Mr. Clinton's tiny coupé rounding the corner.

"Who was skeered of who?" demanded Fish of his better half as he opened the rusty screen door and reëntered the restaurant.

"Here poppa now," replied Macedonia. She was all agog at these topsy-turvy occurrences, and expected at any moment to see an explosion that would blow Fish to atoms.

Mr. Clinton came in with a check and a folded piece of paper in his yellow hand. The proprietor, being summoned, signed this bill of sale, and Mr. Clinton gave him the check.

"What do dat paper say?" inquired Fish in his new loud voice.

"Dat paper jes' a receipt," explained Mr. Clinton, folding it and putting it in his pocket.

"What do it say? Read it," commanded Fish in his grand manner.

Mr. Clinton frowned, but took out the paper. Fish snatched it from his hand and passed it to Macedonia.

"What do it say?" he repeated.

"It say," read Macedonia, "dat Mister Washington sell dis place to Mister Clinton for cash in hand paid."

Fish passed the paper to Mr. Clinton. "Change dat Clinton to say de place is sold to Fish Kelly, Junior," he directed.

Mr. Clinton felt the impulse to murder, but he realized that until he could connect with Lawyer Little he was a beaten man. He made the change.

"Now I keeps dis," announced Fish, and he put it in his pocket.

Fish's plan of "scaring the other fellow first" had been so successful, without exception, that he felt he had the world by the tail. He stared at Mr. Clinton with so much assurance that Mr. Clinton was convinced Fish was in a position to wreck his life. As a matter of

fact, the idea had never entered Fish's mind that his father-in-law was anything but a model of virtue. Fish, with a clear conscience, was simply benefiting from the truth that a bad conscience makes the bravest man a coward. Mr. Clinton's eyes wavered and turned aside. His expression of anger changed to one of forced hilarity.

"You's a good business man, Fish." He wrinkled his square yellow face in a pained grin. Behind his horn spectacles he was thinking that if he could find Lawyer Little and charge him with stealing the bond, he could frighten him into helping still to make the plot against Fish work out. So long as the clever and ruthless Lawyer was on his side, the odds were yet with him.

Even as Mr. Clinton thought this, Fish drew a crackly piece of green-printed paper from his pocket.

"Another thing," he snapped, "here a paper worth a thousan' dollars at de bank. You know dem people; I wants you to git de money for me—leave it in de bank an' bring me a receipt."

Mr. Clinton's eyes protruded and his mouth dropped open hopelessly. Fish had placed in his hand his own thousand-dollar railway

bond—and had instructed him what to do with it.

Mr. Clinton mechanically put the bond in his pocket. This was evidence enough, to his mind, that Lawyer and Fish had got together to fight him. If so, there was nothing to do but submit. Lawyer had knowledge of his conscienceless plot against his son-in-law; Fish, he thought, knew the secrets of his past. He was beaten because the cards were stacked against him.

"I'll bring you de receipt, Fish," said Mr. Clinton. And in his voice was a note of respect that no one had ever heard there before. Fish heard it and rejoiced. Mr. Clinton, with his broad shoulders somewhat drooped, walked slowly from the lunch room and turned up the street toward the bank.

Macedonia looked after him in wonder. Then her gaze rested upon Fish in an admiration that was close to awe.

"Fish, how come poppa treat you so respectful? How come Lawyer Little skeered of you, too?"

"How come it? I done shook 'em bofe up in a bag of flour. Dat's how come it. I done change dere color."

This was a bit thick, but Macedonia accepted the results as sufficiently explanatory.

"I always thought you was gwine to be a great man, Fish. I always did."

"An' you was right," agreed Fish as he complacently thrust a hand, Napoleon-wise, into his breast. He rested his weight upon one heel and turned the other foot outward at an angle of careless elegance.

Looking down to admire his pose, he observed a large black toe that emerged through an aperture in his shoe.

"Ne' mind, toe," he assured that member, "from now on you an' me gwine be settin' pretty!"

(1)

THE END

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